The reign of Charles I, prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, witnessed royal dependence on numerous financial expedients—forced loans, compulsory knighthoods, ship money, coat and conduct money—which aroused hostility and criticism among certain of the more vociferous of his subjects.\(^1\) The second Stuart inherited an impoverished royal treasury, and the eleven years' interval without parliament further curtailed the king's access to traditional sources of income. Despite Charles's ingenuity for financial devices of dubious legality, opposition to the ship money tax was due more often to mundane bureaucratic problems, such as procedural confusion in rating or dissatisfaction with administrative personnel, than to principled constitutional objections.\(^2\) By 1640, when the House of Commons exploited ship money as a major grievance against the king and indicted Charles's governance, three of the complaints in the Grand Remonstrance concerned ship money.\(^3\) During the annual

\(^1\) Several scholars have assisted and encouraged my work on ship money at various stages; I acknowledge the generous assistance of Dr. J. H. Hexter, Dr. T. A. Green, Mr. Conrad Russell, Dr. F. Taylor. I also owe special gratitude to Dr. Paul R. Hyams. Any errors herein are, of course, my own.

\(^2\) The general thesis of my dissertation, "The Grievance of Ship Money under Charles I: A Study in Administration and Parliamentary Politics" (now in progress, Yale University), on which this article is based. Other Caroline financial expedients gave rise to famous "test cases." For example, the Five Knights Case, 1627, originated from refusal to pay the forced loan. Hampden's Case, 1637-8, challenged the technical sufficiency of the ship money writ; see below, p. 138, n. 1.

\(^3\) The Grand Remonstrance enumerated ship money among Charles's "malicious endeavors":

§ 20. "And although this was taken upon pretense of guarding the seas, yet a new, unheard-of tax of ship money was devised, and upon the same pretense, by both of which there was charged upon the subject near £700,000 some years, and yet the merchants have been left so naked to the violence of the Turkish
levies from 1634 until 1639, however, there was no comparable condemnation of the tax. Indeed, although Hampden's Case in 1637-8 arose as a legal challenge to ship money, the personal fame of the defendant eclipsed the significance of the issue.

The present article will concentrate on the quieter, less flamboyant aspects of the ship money levy—its routine daily administration and implementation at the county level. For Somerset, Barnes has demonstrated the mechanism for levying the imposition, and the numerous complications that developed in the performance of "His Majesty's service", based on both county records and central government sources. However, the documentation for Cheshire ship money is more fortunate: the survival of a sheriff's letterbook that deals exclusively with the 1637 levy permits a thorough analysis of the assessment and collection of ship money.

Sir Thomas Cholmondeley served as high sheriff of the county palatine in 1637. His notebook, a series of signed documents, is unique. Only one similar letterbook, that of Sir

pirates, that many great ships of value and thousands of His Majesty's subjects have been taken by them, and do still remain in miserable slavery".

§ 77. "Twelve subsidies were demanded for the release of ship money alone".
§ 113. "The ship money is abolished, which cost the kingdom about £200,000 a year".

Three other sections (c. 34, 97, 98) complained of the effects on subjects who refused to pay such "unlawful charges" as ship money: expensive law suits, the hazard of appearance before the Privy Council, and threat of Star Chamber prosecution.

1 The major technical point on which Hampden based his case was the sufficiency of the writ; he argued that the ship money writ should have issued from the King in Parliament, rather than from Chancery, King and Privy Council. Because the whole procedure of the ship money levy was irregular and invalid, Charles's subjects did not, according to Hampden, have to pay. The issue of whether or not ship money was an illegal, i.e. extraparliamentary, tax was a subsidiary question that developed during argument by Hampden's lawyers. See T. B. Howell, ed., State Trials, 1816 ed., iii. 825-1316 passim. Hampden's lawyers presented five major objections that allegedly nullified the writ's legality: (1) irregular procedure, and improper issuance, (2) the requirements were too vague and general, and therefore did not compel payment, (3) the writ was void in law, because the purpose of the ships was not stated, (4) the alleged "danger" to the realm was not explicitly demonstrated, and (5) the manner of assessment was unlawful (v. State Trials, iii. 880-90 passim, 855-6, 863).

Peter Temple, sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1635, has been published.  

Cholmondeley’s notebook is subtitled “the book of all the proceeding of all business” for the year 1637. Although ship money was no longer a novelty in 1637, the sheriff was apparently preoccupied with its levy. This fact is somewhat strange, for in Cheshire the previous impositions had succeeded promptly and fully. The palatinate’s levies went comparatively well; his two predecessors had encountered no significant difficulties. Neither had they ever attracted censure or reprimand from the Privy Council, as other sheriffs had done. Cholmondeley himself, during his tenure of office and afterwards, was repeatedly chided by central administrators. In spite of relatively complaisant levies in Cheshire, Cholmondeley probably kept a notebook simply because he was a conscientious agent of the Crown.

Cholmondeley’s letterbook proves that although Cheshire escaped major disruptions and troublesome arrears, the assessment and collection of ship money was by no means uneventful. The sheriff was in an unenviable position, caught between local politics on the one hand and his responsibility to King and Privy

1 C. G. Bonsey and J. G. Jenkins, eds., Ship Money Papers (Buckinghamshire Rec. Soc., 1965). These papers are not signed documents and do not describe the administrative machinery in great detail, as does Cholmondeley’s letterbook. However, Temple’s papers contain more information on defaulters and distraints.

2 Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 1; the italicizing is mine.

3 M. D. Gordon, “The Collection of Ship Money in the Reign of Charles I”, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 3rd Ser., iv (1910), 155-61, a table of ship money assessments and collections, 1634-9, for all counties. For Cheshire levies see SP16/315/36; by 3 March 1635/6, Sheriff Thomas Aston had paid £3,200 of the county’s ship money to Sir William Russell, treasurer of the Navy. The remaining £300 was paid by the end of the month (v. SP16/315/361). Therefore, as the writ for that levy was issued on 4 August 1635, Aston had completed payment in 9 months. On the 1636 writ, Sheriff Delves had collected £2,100 by 1 April 1637 (v. SP16/352/3). One month later, he had forwarded £2,330 to Secretary Russell (v. SP16/355/16), leaving an arrear of £670. One year after the 1636 writ, Delves had collected the assessment in full; however, Chester city’s portion remained outstanding (v. SP16/366/24). See also SP16/348/35 and 349/87, where Sheriff Delves explained to the Privy Council the “difficulties met in making assessments” for 1636 ship money: constables refused to assist, and the few who did failed to account tradesmen in rating. Delves also complained that “private wrangling between neighbours” impeded the levy, and that officials were often unable to evaluate personal wealth of ratepayers accurately.
Council on the other. After a brief description of the manuscript, this article will undertake to analyse Cholmondeley’s supervision of the 1637 levy in Cheshire.

The manuscript, now in the possession of The John Rylands University Library of Manchester, consists of 37 pages, seven inches in width by ten inches in length. Most pages are written on both sides; a few, however, are blank.¹ The manuscript is in excellent condition, and the hand is clear and legible; less than a dozen words are obscured by the seepage of the brown ink through the paper. The contemporary parchment binding is also in good condition. The contents of the letterbook consist of a series of signed documents, copied by a scribe, who was possibly the under-sheriff or another subordinate, perhaps named Digge.² But Cholmondeley himself examined and verified the contents; his signature occurs thirty-nine times, usually at the conclusion of documents issued in his official capacity as sheriff.³

The notebook includes four types of documents: (1) those received from the central government, such as the King’s 1637 ship money writ and the concomitant Privy Council instructions, (2) the sheriff’s warrants and detailed directions for administration, (3) correspondence from Cholmondeley, both within the county and to the Board in London, involving two protracted ship money disputes, and (4) his official certification of assessments. Thus, the letterbook illuminates two spheres of ship money bureaucracy, firstly the local arena itself and secondly its relationship to central administration. Implementation at the county level, by the sheriff’s subordinate officers, is detailed. Several entries pertain to the rival jurisdictions of the sheriff and the mayor and aldermen of the autonomous city of Chester.⁴

¹ Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091; the blank folios are 1⁵, 2²⁵, 2⁶, 2⁹, 3⁰, 3²³²⁵, 3⁴³⁴⁵, 3⁵⁵.
² The signature “Digge” appears on ff. 4 and 5⁵, and is in the same hand as the rest of the manuscript. The two signatures follow the copy of the king’s writ in Latin and its translation into English. I have been unable to identify “Digge”.
³ That is, warrants to head and petty constables, certification of assessments as required by the Council Board, or correspondence with the magistrates of Chester city on disputed ship money rates or jurisdictions.
⁴ The two disputes involved the assessment of Sir Thomas Aston, for his impost on French wines in Chester city, and the assessment of inhabitants of
brief statement of conclusions on the relationship between Sheriff Cholmondeley in Cheshire and the Privy Council in London is useful here, to provide a sufficient context in which to dissect the minutiae of the administrative machinery of ship money assessment and collection.

The implementation of the levy clearly demonstrated the limitations of early Stuart governance. Fundamentally, the Crown depended on the co-operation of unpaid agents who happened to be sensitive to the vagaries of county politics and local pressures. Weaknesses inherent in the bureaucracy—such as noncompliance of subordinate officers, challenges to shrieval authority (resulting from the annual discontinuity of the office and of the levy), and the ability of local magnates to undermine the proceedings—somewhat hindered the collection of the 1637 ship money. The lack of effective co-ordination between local and central administrators merely exacerbated the sheriff’s task. That is, the Privy Council was unable or unwilling to settle county disputes quickly. The Board relied on intermediaries and arbitrators, a procedure which was cumbersome, sometimes partisan, and always slow. Also, reluctance of sheriffs and of the Board to prosecute negligent officials or defaulters, on account of the difficulties and expense involved, imperilled full collection. In these circumstances, then, the sheriff often became the scapegoat blamed for the levy’s failure. The Council frequently chided Cholmondeley, who discovered that the Board could be more capricious than subordinate officers.

Gloverstone, a liberty situated within the city’s precincts. See below, p. 149, n. 1 and 2, for fuller references.

1 Because ship money writs were addressed to the sheriff, whose tenure of office was only one year, each successive levy required a new writ, to authorize a new local bureaucracy to implement the levy. But each sheriff was personally liable for whatever arrears might be incurred; therefore, officials often tried to collect ship money long after their tenure as sheriff had expired. In such cases, former sheriffs needed special warrants from the incumbent, and the validity of such authorization was frequently challenged. See, for example, SP16/450/125, where a Leicester sheriff refused to grant his predecessor a warrant. Also SP16/442/107. The annual discontinuity provoked “unnecessary scruples” and fatuous questions: see SP16/346/95: 316/92, where the sheriff of Oxfordshire raised, in the Privy Council’s opinion, “a very unnecessary doubt”; 344/90, 91, a few similar instances in various counties. 
Undoubtedly, the Crown could have redesigned and improved the administrative machinery. Under Elizabeth, for example, ship money had been collected by justices of the peace and lords lieutenant. There were no precedents for shrieval supervision, and actually this innovation caused the vast majority of complications in the levies. At least three possibilities existed: (1) the creation of special commissioners, (2) supervision by justices or (3) implementation by lords and deputy lieutenants. The concluding section of this article will examine each of these options and speculate on why King Charles did not adopt them. But first, the administrative machinery which did function must be understood. And Cholmondeley's letterbook describes that bureaucracy.

II

Sir Thomas's involvement with ship money began even before he was sheriff. On 13 October 1637 he was sworn into office; on the previous day, however, a Privy Council messenger had delivered the King's ship money writ, along with the patent for the shrievalty.1 The early receipt of the ship money commission probably indicated the Crown's urgency to begin the levy immediately.

Cholmondeley's financial liability also commenced at the outset. He paid £3 for pursuivant's fees for delivery, and another £4 14s. 4d. to have the two documents enrolled in the Exchequer at Chester. What portion of this £7 expenditure covered the ship money writ cannot be determined.2 The record of this information, however, seems to be unique among all ship money documentation, and it is significant for two reasons. Cholmondeley preserved details of procedure so prosaically routine that they are usually lost to historians. In terms of ship money, the financial liability the sheriff incurred, beyond

1 Ryl. Engl. MS. 1091, f. 3, gives 12 October 1637 as the date of receipt of the documents.
2 Ibid. f. 8v. Cholmondeley did not separate the charges for the ship money writ and the shrieval patent. The expenditure was incorrectly totalled at £2 15s. 2d. (it was actually £2 15s.). He paid the Privy Council pursuivant £3. To enrol the documents at Chester he paid £4 14s. 4d., nearly double his billing from the central government.
personal responsibility for payment of arrears, commenced immediately, at his very assumption of office, before his supervisory duties. And the expense could be substantial. Finally, the inclusion of these precise facts suggests that Cholmondeley was conscientious and reliable. Did he really deserve the Council’s displeasure, or were their accusations of laxity unjust? The answer to this question involves judgement of the larger problem: the entire administration of ship money and the relationship between the central bureaucracy and local officials.

The writ explained His Majesty’s exact demands on the County Palatine. Cholmondeley had the Latin text copied verbatim and then translated the order into English.¹ Technically the writ demanded the provision of a 300-ton ship and supplies, the crew’s wages and victuals for 26 weeks’ service. The Privy Council converted this into a money equivalent in instructions to the sheriff that soon followed the writ.² The County Palatine was to contribute £3,000 to His Majesty’s service in 1637; of this amount, the Council set the city of Chester’s portion at £260. Therefore, Sir Thomas had to assess and collect £2,740 ship money in Cheshire during his shrievalty.

A standard formula, the King’s writ offered the same justifications for each new levy from 1634 until 1639. These reasons are catalogued here in order to facilitate a complete evaluation of the ship money imposition in Stuart England. Charles I required the levies for both commercial and political reasons. Pirates had menaced English trade, seized merchandise as well as Englishmen, and thereby jeopardized national security.³

¹ Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fols. 3-4 for the Latin text; fols. 4-5 for the English translation.
² The Privy Council had a standard formula for conversion from tonnage to cash; the money equivalent amounted to ten times the tonnage of ship(s) required.
³ “Turks” was probably a generic name for pirates from the Barbary States. For English public sentiment on the serious threat of Turkish piracy see SP16/279/106, a treatise by Nathaniel Knott, “Advice of a Seaman touching the Expedition against the Turkish Pirates”. Knott’s pamphlet, written in 1634 and dedicated to Archbishop Laud, presumed that the King’s ship money writ intended an expedition against the Turks. He lamented the loss of England’s reputation in sea affairs. There is, however, no adequate study of piracy in the 1630s. If the gravity of the danger of piracy could be assessed, then the Crown’s
To meet his royal responsibility—the defence of the seas, the kingdom and his subjects—the King now commanded each county to contribute a ship with crew, ammunition and stores; this navy would assemble at Portsmouth. Inland as well as maritime counties were now to perform “His Majesty’s service”; after all, the responsibility for national defence “should...be supported by all...according to the ancient laws and customs of the kingdom.”

Within one month after receipt of the writ, the sheriff had to assess each ratepayer “according to his estate and ability”. If payment were not forthcoming, the writ empowered the sheriff to distrain and then to sell goods, the value of which equalled (at least in theory) the assessment. Furthermore, he should imprison any defaulters found “refractory or disobedient”. Any surplus collected had to be refunded “equally and ratably”.

The writ empowered the sheriff to assess inhabitants of all boroughs, towns, villages and hamlets throughout the county, both for landholdings and goods or chattels. This was a significant innovation: ship money taxed both real and personal property. Unlike most other taxes which were customarily assessed on either real or personal property, ship money was a progressive tax which touched a much broader base. The Privy Council designed this imposition to tap new mercantile wealth that had long eluded the Crown’s coffers. Aside from its objectives in ship money levies might be evaluated more easily. The continuing threat of piracy might indicate the King’s sincerity in protecting the realm’s commercial interests. What seems improbable, however, is that this danger from piracy remained constant throughout the later 1630s, despite its mention in every writ. The question is important because from the first levy some Englishmen doubted the sincerity of Charles’s motives. Some members of the Short Parliament in 1640 accused the King of appropriating the money for his personal use, but M. D. Gordon (op. cit.) has demonstrated that ship money was indeed used for the Navy, as the King repeatedly claimed. Gordon’s article does not deal with the problem of piracy.

1 Only maritime towns and counties were asked for ship money in the 1634 writ; in 1635, inland counties were added. The expansion of the levy was justified by the Roman law maxim, “quod omnes tangit...”. The King subtly defined “approval” as financial responsibility.

2 SP16/347/59: A paper endorsed by Secretary Nicholas, from Sir William Belasys, “respecting the rating of lays and taxes” in Durham. “The assessments were regulated by a book of rates made in the time of Queen Elizabeth,
economic advantages, however, this novel feature was also highly significant for administration. Precedents for other assessments were wholly inadequate guides for ship money; yet, the Council expected the sheriff to rely on these imperfect models. Indeed, this defective planning and bureaucracy complicated shrieval administration.

The Board’s detailed instructions provided Sir Thomas with more specific guidelines for Cheshire. Assessments based on locality rather than person presumably circumvented the complications of absentee landlordism. Poor cottagers, or “those who have nothing but their daily work, and those on alms”, should be exempted. But men “of ability and of gainful trade” were to contribute. The Council reiterated the royal injunction that all assessments be impartial and equitable.

Only the Board’s instructions mention a second innovative feature of ship money: the assessment of clergy as well as laity. King Charles, however, resolved to maintain all traditional clerical privileges (although he failed to supply any precise definition thereof). The sheriff assessed both ecclesiastical and temporal estates, but with especial care to rate equitably. Indeed, throughout the levies the Crown never pressed Cheshire clergy for maximum contributions; although the imposition fell on churchmen, the King deliberately softened its impact.

The Council detailed the machinery of assessment and collection. Sir Thomas issued warrants to head and petty constables, who then summoned “discreetest” men from each

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which is exceedingly defective” (italics mine). The Council instructed the sheriff to consult the justices of the county, and Sir Richard Hutton, a justice of Common Pleas, if necessary, to set “equal and indifferent rates”.

1 Such is the implication of the Privy Council’s instructions to the sheriff. Administrators who questioned assessment by locality raised “causeless interpretations”; v. PC2/45/147; also B.L. Add. MS. 36913, fol. 27.

2 Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 7. Cholmondeley’s orders were to assess the clergy “with this care and caution . . . [to] respect both their persons and dwelling, not suffering any inequalities or pressures to be put upon them”. The Council also stated that such assessments were “not to be prejudicial in the future, to them or to any of their rights and privileges”.

3 This conclusion is based on an analysis of G. T. O. Bridgeman, “Loans, Contributions, Subsidies and Ship Money Paid by the Clergy of the Diocese of Chester, 1620-1639”, Lanc. and Cheshire Rec. Soc., xii (1885), 45-129.
locality to assist in making individual assessments. These rates had to be certified in writing; within one month after assessment Cholmondeley had to report this information to the Board. To collect ship money, the sheriff employed as many subordinates as necessary. Defaulters should be distrained or imprisoned, but never treated leniently, in order to discourage resistance.

Since resistance might also appear among subordinate officials who aided in assessment and collection, the Council directed Cholmondeley to hand over any negligent constable or bailiff to appear before the Board in London. If subordinates declined to answer for their negligence, the sheriff should imprison them. By virtue of the writ, the sheriff had special powers and the Council urged him to maximize his authority. These exhortations, however, were useless in the face of obduracy among officials or ratepayers. The one group could sabotage the internal machinery; the other could render the whole operation superfluous. In either case, the sheriff was powerless. Unfortunately, although the sheriff was the hinge on which success or failure of the levy depended, the Council's instructions left him exposed and vulnerable. From his neighbours the sheriff risked criticism, threats of physical abuse, and expensive lawsuits; from the Council he faced censure, financial responsibility for arrears, protracted legal proceedings, and possibly imprisonment. That Cholmondeley felt insulted when the Board questioned his "pains and industry in His Majesty's service" is certainly understandable; occasionally, he must have shared a colleague's frustration that the thankless task of administering the ship levy made life "nothing but toil".

Finally, the Council warned Cholmondeley that if any ship money remained in arrears, his personal financial responsibility would continue although his tenure of office may have ended. A new sheriff would not assume collection of his predecessor's

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1 SP16/460/35, where the sheriff had "drawn on himself the ill-will of the chief men of the hundred, who threaten him with numberless suits as soon as he is out of office", because he had imprisoned a constable for "willful neglect of the ship money service".

2 Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 27v.

3 Sir Peter Temple, sheriff of Buckinghamshire in 1635, in a letter to his mother (v. Bonsey and Jenkins, Ship Money Papers, p. 14).
arrears. In this stipulation, another weakness in the bureaucracy becomes apparent. Each successive levy was authorized by a new writ and supervised by a new sheriff. Therefore, the system perpetuated an annual discontinuity. Whose warrants were operative, the present or the former sheriff's, when money was due on two levies simultaneously? Such technicalities provided numerous opportunities to forestall payment or for constables to confound the machinery. Former sheriffs who tried to collect arrears found their authority challenged. The Board's only solution was to spill more ink and to reprimand the sheriff for allowing the problem to occur.

In summary, then, inherent weaknesses riddled the administrative machinery. Certainly Cholmondeley's supervision of the 1637 Cheshire levy furnishes a case study that demonstrates how these broad conceptual problems actually affected ship money assessment and collection in the county.

Sheriff Cholmondeley followed the Board's imperfect directions carefully. He first intended to secure some continuity between shrievalties by issuing his predecessor a writ of aid, to validate the former sheriff's efforts to complete the 1636 levy. Then, on 17 October 1637, four days after he was sworn as sheriff, he issued warrants to head constables throughout the county to begin the execution of His Majesty's 1637 writ. He faithfully rehearsed the royal rationale. In order to assure "the most speedy course for effecting of so important an affair", he relied completely on precedents from former years. These earlier levies had succeeded so well that Cholmondeley need not conduct new rates. He instructed the head constables to assemble two weeks later in late October at Northwich, to present completed lists of assessments on individual ratepayers in all districts.

Was two weeks' time sufficient to accomplish the assessment of all eligible ratepayers in the palatinate? Apparently not, for

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1 See for example, SP16/318/75, where the Sheriff of Oxfordshire reported that "no money has been or can be gathered in their parish till the sheriff makes known to them [i.e., defaulters] a law or statute binding them thereunto... they shall remain in suspense and expectation of answer...".

2 Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 9. Cholmondeley took the action on 16 October 1637.
in early November, Cholmondeley again exhorted the constables to rate "with equality and indifference . . . with all speed". At least in theory, ship money bureaucracy embodied a chain of command that followed a neat pyramid of descending authority—from Privy Council, to sheriff, to subordinate officers, assessors and collectors. However, in practice this system was cumbersome within the county and extremely consumptive of manpower. Cheshire contained seven hundreds, and each was divided into halves; the sheriff therefore had fourteen head constables on whom to rely for assessment and collection. Sir Thomas also sent warrants to petty constables—402 of them! Thus, 417 official agents of the Crown became personally involved in county ship money administration. The number of non-officials, those "discreetest" inhabitants who assisted, cannot even be calculated. Obviously, to complete the rating rapidly, within two weeks, a veritable army of personnel had to be employed. But overstaffing could also adversely affect success and efficiency, particularly when guidelines were inadequate and ratepayers sometimes reluctant to contribute.

Indeed, from the beginning Cholmondeley and his subordinates lacked the co-operation of their predecessors. The sheriff warned that any former constable who refused to provide necessary helpful information would be presented, but the threat was rarely executed. On 19 October, only a week after his assumption of office, Cholmondeley requested from his predecessor "the county book and assessment rolls" for clergy as well as laity. In all likelihood the former sheriff played for time. The note penned in the margin, "No answer to this was returned but fair words", suggests Cholmondeley’s disgust. His later protest to the Board, that his predecessor’s obstinacy had prejudiced the 1637 levy, was probably justified.

While head and petty constables assessed and collected from individual ratepayers, Cholmondeley directed his energies towards two complicated cases of disputed jurisdiction. The first concerned Sir Thomas Aston, the customs farmer of French wines in the port of Chester; the question was whether he should

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1 Ibid. fol. 12-12v.  
2 Ibid. fol. 10.  
3 Idem.
pay ship money with the county or with the city.  

The second involved the assessment of inhabitants of Gloverstone, a liberty situated within the precincts of the city of Chester.  

Both questions recurred in every Cheshire levy from 1635 until 1638, and the disputes always revolved around the same issue: rival jurisdictions between the county sheriff and the magistrates of the autonomous city of Chester. Both the sheriff and the mayor and aldermen of the port ignored the Privy Council’s orders whenever convenient to do so.

Cholmondeley’s letterbook contains most of the correspondence among the three parties—the sheriff, the Chester magistrates and the Privy Council. Analysis of these protracted disputes reveals both the complications which the sheriff encountered and his own mismanagement of ship money administration. Although Cholmondeley was no perfect bureaucrat, he was innocent of the Board’s charges of negligence. On both sides there was ample reason for discontent; yet given the administrative machinery that had been established, neither local nor central officials could really have improved their effectiveness or efficiency.

On 23 October 1637 city officials sent the new sheriff a copy of the Board’s order that customs farmer Sir Thomas Aston should be assessed for ship money with Chester, and not with the county. The mayor felt compelled to notify Cholmondeley because of a rumour that Aston might try to exploit the discontinuity in the shrievalty to his own advantage, and raise the question for a third time. The city sought his co-operation against this disgruntled ratepayer who had the sophistication to employ legal manoeuvres in the hope of mitigating his ship money assessments. A week later, Cholmondeley pledged his

1 B.L., Harl. MS. 2093, fols. 88-179 is a collection of documents relating to the dispute. The individual pieces are scattered through the State Papers Domestic and the Privy Council Registers.


3 Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 10.

4 Aston’s disputed assessment on his French wines impost continued for three years; v. PC2/45/428, double assessment on the 1636 writ. A Council
assistance. Satisfied with the Council’s decision, he preferred not to become involved:

My hands are closed, not to meddle with the assessing of Aston for the impost on wines, but to leave the same wholly to you.¹

Concerning the Gloverstone question, however, Cholmondeley was by no means so understanding and complaisant. This case had also been referred to the Board in London, but they made no definitive resolution. Instead, they ordered the earl of Derby and the judges of Chester to examine the Gloverstone matter at the next assize. In the meantime, the city magistrates hoped “no occasion for complaint would arise”, and cautioned the sheriff against assessing the inhabitants, for double assessments were forbidden by the Council.² But unfortunately, the arbitrators were unable to investigate the question at the next assize, which necessitated the continuation of the case.³ Sir Thomas, however, did not intend to wait for fact-finders. Although he, too, hoped to avoid formal complaints, he had “good encouragement and advice [that] Gloverstone undoubtedly belongs to my [i.e. the county’s] assessment.”⁴ He therefore insisted on his authority and jurisdiction, against the mayor’s. To do otherwise would prejudice the county’s rights. Double assessment on the inhabitants of the liberty need not occur, if only the city would desist from its specious claims.

This correspondence was not mere badinage; Cholmondeley intended to prosecute his authority. He suggested that while awaiting the decision from the examiners appointed by the Board, both he as sheriff and the magistrates of the city should assess the Gloverstone inhabitants, and allow the ratepayers themselves to choose which assessment they preferred.⁵ But this proposal for

decision in 1636 (PC2/46/79) was not accepted by Aston; accordingly, in May 1637, there was a second decision (PC2/47/404). In May 1638 the Board ordered Aston to observe its two former decisions (PC2/49/220), but a few months later the Chester Magistrates complained that Aston had not yet paid (PC2/49/332).

¹ Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 11v. ² Ibid. fol. 10v. ³ Ibid. fol. 11. ⁴ Ibid. fol. 11v. ⁵ It is unclear whether Cholmondeley meant that the Gloverstone inhabitants should choose individually or collectively.
action directly contradicted the letter and spirit of the Privy Council’s instructions.

Was Cholmondeley guilty of duplicity or merely of stupidity? His proposal meant suicide for “His Majesty’s service”. If the ratepayers could choose whichever assessment they preferred, soon no one would pay at all. Sir Thomas probably realized that his scheme directly undermined the Council’s instructions, but its very impracticality was, from his viewpoint, advantageous. His strategy seemed to rely on deliberate obfuscation of procedure in order to bolster a questionable exercise of authority. But with the circumstances of the sheriff’s job, small-scale sabotage of the administrative machinery was understandable. Supervision of the levy was, after all, a thankless task, and Sir Thomas had to protect himself, especially financially. An intelligent sheriff would endeavour to raise the required £2,740 ship money by making any and all possible assessments. An easy way to net extra ratepayers was to exploit disputed jurisdictions, particularly in the absence of clear precedents. By poor planning and failure to support the sheriff consistently, the Council had almost forced even loyal servants of the Crown to hedge a little on His Majesty’s service. These unpaid, unappreciated local administrators begrudged both the pound assessment and the pound of flesh.

Nor was Cholmondeley the only administrator who tried somehow to salvage an impossible situation. The Chester magistrates promptly agreed to the sheriff’s plan. Although Sir Thomas refused to surrender jurisdiction over Gloverstone to the city, this scheme might permit the city to diffuse its ship money liability a little more widely. Therefore, the mayor agreed to double assessment of the liberty, but wanted the money collected “to be deposited in indifferent hands”, until the question was definitively settled. Obviously, both the city’s and the county’s jurisdictions could not be valid; yet, neither volunteered to relinquish its claim. The mayor recommended one available solution to the impasse: to leave the determination of the legitimate assessment to the inhabitants of Gloverstone.¹ Thus, all Cheshire administrators, city and county officials alike,

¹ Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fols. 14r-14v.
preferred this objectionable procedure rather than the orderly but lengthy process of adjudication by the earl of Derby, as the Council had desired.

The entire responsibility for subverting the Board's directions did not, then, rest with Cholmondeley alone. The Privy Council in London was isolated from the vagaries of the county politics and administrative dilemmas which embroiled the sheriff. But Sir Thomas did not intentionally sabotage the levy; beset on all sides with impossible tasks and little or no support, he probably just did not see clearly. He perceived himself as an honest, diligent agent of the Crown, more beleaguered than he deserved, but still determined to succeed in His Majesty's "urgent business". He never really understood that any other interpretation of his service was possible. The Privy Council, however, did not share the sheriff's satisfaction with himself, and over this difference of opinion, Cholmondeley felt pained, almost betrayed.¹ The sheriff's correspondence with Sir Edward Nicholas, clerk of the Council, revealed his pique.

On 27 January 1637/8, the Board reminded Cholmondeley that he had failed to comply with their original order to certify within the first month what assessments had been made on Cheshire ratepayers.² He did not receive this memo until mid-February, but then he promptly explained. The Council's letter was "very welcome", but Sir Thomas was very "sorry that my pains and industry in His Majesty's service should be questioned". His own records were so thorough that he was "almost able to keep a diary of [the] proceedings". He vehemently denied "any intermission" in his diligence. The dilatory progress of the levy in Cheshire was not his fault:

The impediments of my proceeding have been a great confusion in the last year's assessment, in that the warrants did not accord, I having no... rolls from my predecessor to certify them.³

Secondly, some towns and parishes which had been overcharged withheld payment, in the hope of abatements. Despite these difficulties, however, Cholmondeley now compiled the full certification required.

¹ Ibid. fol. 27v. ² Ibid. fol. 27. ³ Ibid. fol. 27v.
Sir Thomas instructed his subordinates to follow the procedure described by the Council, and took the utmost care to produce equitable rates on clergy as well as laymen. Chester magistrates accepted the Board's determination that the city should pay £260. To collect the county's £2,740 share, the sheriff relied on his predecessor's rates. Here was the first serious irregularity of Sir Thomas's 1637 levy. He admitted to the Council that if all the money rated according to the previous year's assessments were collected, "there would be a surplus of £70 or £80 to be restored". Nevertheless, he issued warrants to utilize the old rates, contrary to the warning in the King's ship money writ against overcharge. If he had realized initially that the rates would produce a surplus, technically he should have conducted new, accurate assessments. However, the laborious task would have been formidable, and the sheriff opted for the easiest shortcut. Instead, he devised a cumbersome procedure by which to refund the surplus, and admitted its awkwardness to the Council. Thus at the outset he had not faithfully implemented the Board's directions. Well might the Council have rebuked him, but on this clear violation they never censured him. Both the local and central government administrators were equally guilty of compromises that interfered with the levies.

By mid-February 1638, however, Cholmondeley had collected £2,389 9s. 6d. through this ramshackle machinery; only £350 of the total ship money remained outstanding, and he was confident that its payment would be forthcoming. He had

1 Ibid. fols. 9v, 12. His predecessor's rates were "safer and best", because there had been few complaints. In the event of new complaints, Cholmondeley would reform the old assessments. He estimated that by this method the total amount "came to about £2,720, besides the clergy money".

2 Ibid. fol. 28.

3 Idem. "Upon the full levying of the money, I would either restore to the high constables such surplusage as should happen to be distributed where they conceived there was any overcharge, or else upon further information as they should appear good cause, I would abate the assessment to such towns or persons as should be unjustly overcharged. In this way I have gone, wherein I found many discordances of payments from the purpose of the warrants presented unto me, and diverse complaints and pressures of divers poor men. And with much travail, I have accorded the one, and relieved the other . . .".

4 Ibid. fols. 28-28v.
rated by locality, but occasionally found the distinction between
the clergy's temporal and ecclesiastical estates difficult to
maintain. He was reluctant to insist on the separate classifica­
tions of clerical rates because he wanted to avoid a petition to the
Privy Council from Cheshire churchmen. Generally, however,
assessments on laymen had proceeded smoothly, and Chol­
mondeley now enclosed with his explanatory letter the list of
rates on each township in the county's seven hundreds.¹

Why was the sheriff's certification to the Council five months
late? Was he negligent and lazy, as the Board implied? Or
did he encounter legitimate complications and delays? The
evidence of the letterbook suggests no simple answer, but
rather a combination of personal shortcomings, bona fide
administrative difficulties, noncooperation from subordinate
officers, and some dilatory manoeuvres from aristocratic rate-
payers.

In February 1638 Cholmondeley reported to the Board that
"His Majesty's service has more readily [proceeded] and is
settled without murmur or reluctance".² Yet a month earlier
he had issued a warrant to recover ship money that a head
constable had collected but refused to pay over; if the officer
continued "to detain the residue in his hands", the sheriff
would not hesitate to imprison him.³ Every link in the
administrative chain was weak: Cholmondeley threatened
imprisonment for petty constables who failed to hand over
collected ship money to their superiors.⁴ The lack of co-
operation was not confined simply to underling administrators.
Three ratepayers had "in the most contemptuous manner
violently rescued...the distrants" made upon them by the
petty constable; Cholmondeley thereafter ordered that the
defaulters should be imprisoned.⁵ Although outright refusal

¹ Ibid. fol. 28v.
² Idem. The sheriff's secretary had written, "By this means His Majesty's
service hath more readily gone on and is settled with murmur or reluctance".
In examining the text, Cholmondeley noticed the error, and changed the pre­
position; the sheriff's corrected version reads "...settled without murmur or
reluctancy".
³ Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 25v.
⁴ Ibid. fol. 26.
⁵ Ibid. fol. 23.
to pay ship money was not widespread among Cheshire ratepayers, the sheriff did not intend to treat any defaulters leniently.

Because the tax was rated by locality, collection sometimes proved difficult in the case of absentee landlords or simple physical mobility. For example, when one ratepayer moved from a town without paying the 10s. ship money "there assessed on his personal estate", the sheriff instructed the constable to enforce the amount "by distress or otherwise".¹

When the constables certified their assessments at the Northwich meeting, Cholmondeley delivered "an exhortation". No sacrifice of effort or money was too great to make on behalf of "His Majesty's service".² The sheriff hoped his subordinates would all "have one heart and many hands" in the levy. Apparently this rhetoric failed to inspire the constables, because on 9 December the sheriff issued a second set of warrants.³ Originally he stipulated that the entire ship money should be collected by early December, and had his subordinates always performed their duties with diligence, this deadline might have been met. Instead, constables neglected their work and even failed to turn in monies that they had collected. Astonished "at their boldness and contempt of His Majesty's commands", Cholmondeley could do little except rally his troops, reprimand them, and send them out to battle again. Every official was to redouble his efforts. The sheriff would punish any subordinate who failed to improve his performance. Cholmondeley scheduled another meeting for mid-December to re-evaluate the progress of the levy.

The sheriff also encountered ratepayers whose willingness to pay surpassed their ability to do so. For example, the inhabitants of Nantwich, a decaying market town, petitioned the Privy Council for an abatement of the £90 ship money Cholmondeley had required. Among the inhabitants were a few gentlemen of considerable wealth, whose property was dispersed in

¹ Ibid. fol. 23v.
² Ibid. fols. 11v-12r.
³ Ibid. fol. 23. Cholmondeley insisted that if the constables had "performed their duty with diligence", the present extension of 10 days would not have been necessary. His subordinates were to render accounts on 19 December at Northwich.
neighbouring towns; consequently, they were unable to shoulder much of the Nantwich assessment. A few tradesmen lived in the town, but most others were “poor handicraftsmen and day labourers who with their trade and labour are scarce able to maintain their families”.

The rest of the population, about 160 inhabitants, sought for themselves or families “relief in the town” and lived “upon benevolence”. In addition to widespread poverty, Nantwich residents objected that the £90 assessment was more than “seven times as much as any neighbouring town”, whereas other payments had customarily been only three or four times greater. Some reduction was necessary, in view of the economic depression that afflicted the town as well as Cholmondeley’s unusually heavy demand.

The Board considered the petition and asked the sheriff to justify his assessment on the town. They never attempted to investigate the validity of Nantwich’s economic difficulties; yet, the evidence of decline seems unequivocal, as the salt industry had long been depressed. But Cholmondeley saw no reason to alter his assessment. He believed Nantwich’s share was “proportionally rated with the rest of the shire”. Furthermore, his predecessor had levied the same amount on the town. He argued both continuity and reliability: the former sheriff was, after all, “a near neighbour to their town, an ancient justice of their hundred, and better knowing of their estates” than Sir Thomas himself. Nantwich was a “great market town and reputed to be the wealthiest part of the county”. Cholmondeley was absolutely convinced that the assessment was equitable. Moreover, only harm would result from abatement. A change could not be made “without prejudice and retarding His Majesty’s service”. Still, if the Lords felt otherwise, Cholmondeley would of course submit to their wisdom.

Probably both the Nantwich inhabitants and Cholmondeley exaggerated their respective positions. The town’s economic plight was depressed, but perhaps not as seriously as alleged.

1 Ibid. fol. 24.
2 Ibid. fol. 24v. The Board’s decision was made on 29 November 1637; Cholmondeley received written notification thereof on 28 December.
3 Ibid. fol. 25.
Sir Thomas’s assessment did seem heavy, but not enough to risk jeopardizing the levy. Whether the Council ordered an abatement for the town is unknown, but Cholmondeley was understandably irritated by Nantwich, because in July 1638 the town still owed £29 ship money. He had repeatedly tried to obtain payment “by fair and friendly means . . . without extreme coercion”. The constables delayed as long as possible, and now actually refused to pay over the money. The sheriff lost patience and demanded either payment or imprisonment of the recalcitrant officers. Although the townspeople had really paid the assessment, the middlemen refused to hand over the money. Both the town and the subordinate officers had complicated the sheriff's administration of the 1637 ship money levy.

Cholmondeley was probably more vexed by another serious case. An influential aristocratic landholder in Broxton hundred, Sir William Brereton, had personally encouraged tenants and servants on two demesnes to default on their ship money assessments. Here was intolerable subversion of ship money. The amount involved was substantial—£60. As late as August 1638 the constables had been unable to obtain any payment from the townships of Marleston and Lache. Naturally, the bailiffs were reluctant to distraintenants of so powerful a landlord as Brereton. But widespread default in emulation of his opposition had to be prevented at all costs. Cholmondeley felt no intimidation by Brereton. Then again, the sheriff did not have to risk physical abuse himself; he could, and did, pin the danger on his subordinates. He ordered bailiffs to distraint “in

1 Ibid. fols. 32v-33.
2 Ibid. fol. 34v. For Brereton see D.N.B. Brereton also encouraged his tenant not to keep watch and ward (v. SP16/337/43). In fact, he defied everyone—the county sheriff, the Chester city magistrates, and the Privy Council. The Chester magistrates imprisoned the tenant, and certified Brereton’s obduracy to the Council: “Brereton refused to pay his assessment for the late ship money, although . . . but a small proportion . . . of the value of his lands in the city, and he had the directions of the Lords for his payment thereof. He has been several times acquainted therewith . . . yet he refuses to give satisfaction, by reason whereof divers persons refuse . . .”. This case was referred to the earl of Derby for adjudication (PC2/47/41). Brereton claimed he never refused to pay ship money; he thought the assessment unequal, but, upon reconsideration, decided to pay (v. SP16/354/2).
goods and cattle " £60 worth of ship money. If Cholmondeley had to tolerate a capricious Privy Council, his subordinates should deal with possible violence from individual ratepayers.

Just as the sheriff gradually lost patience with his administrators, so the Council became increasingly dissatisfied with his performance. In late June 1638, the Board issued another set of instructions. Approximately £370 of the 1637 ship money remained uncollected, and given the urgency of His Majesty’s business and numerous letters of instruction the sheriff had earlier received, the Council now failed to appreciate any reason why an arrear should exist at all. The writs sufficiently authorized the sheriff to execute the levy promptly. Despite "whatever cause of difficulty may be afterwise pretended", the Council could not now "but impute [the arrear] to [the sheriff’s] own backwardness and remissness".1 His predecessors had collected their levies more efficiently. The Council argued that only the officeholder had changed; thus, Cholmondeley himself was responsible for the dilatory collection. In fact the Board’s reasoning was unfair to the sheriff; but the central administrators in London could not appreciate the many vagaries of county politics during successive ship money levies. For example, Cholmondeley’s predecessors had met no resistance from aristocratic landholders such as Brereton. The Council, however, conveniently pinned their disappointment on the sheriff. The Board found scapegoats more easily available than solutions.

The Privy Council did not accept the explanations for delay that Cholmondeley had offered four months earlier:

And as for the advertisements by you given and queries made of some particulars, which you pretended to give impediments to the service, we esteem them of little consideration, especially at this time, there having been a public judgment passed for the King.2

Here the Council referred to the decision in favour of the Crown in Hampden’s Case, the ship money challenge that had engaged the judges for so many months. Hampden’s Case marked, I believe, the crucial divide between success and failure in the ship money levies, from the viewpoints of local as well as central

1 Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 30.
2 Idem.
administrators. On the one hand, King and Council interpreted the decision as still another resounding vindication of royal authority to levy the tax; actually, however, the judges’ opinions were divided, and almost evenly.¹ But the myopia of King and Council persisted; London and the counties were separate worlds, out of step with one another. In May 1638, for example, Cholmondeley had informed the Board that in Cheshire:

...the general bruit of the late arguments of those judges who concluded against ship money is so plausibly received by those who were too refractory and countenanced by some of rank, that I have found more difficulty in the poor that remain uncollected than in all the rest.²

But the Council’s interpretation of the judicial decision was diametrically opposed to the sheriff’s. The ship money verdict should, so they informed Cholmondeley in June 1638, end all doubt or delay in His Majesty’s service.

Blame for the incomplete levy in Cheshire lay with the sheriff. The Council reprimanded his negligence, and his reluctance to execute his full authority under the writ. They warned him to make every effort, and said they were prepared to prosecute. The Board appointed special attorneys in the Courts of Common Pleas, King’s Bench, and Exchequer to deal exclusively with ship money cases that resulted from distrains made by the sheriff on dilatory ratepayers or actual defaulters.³ Cholmondeley was probably unenthusiastic about the Council’s zeal. Any sheriff would abhor expensive lengthy prosecutions in London. Here, in effect, the Council itself exposed these unpaid local agents of the Crown’s government to ruin. The Council’s orders seemed both senseless and vindictive; no wonder Cholmondeley felt insulted that his efforts had been unappreciated.

¹ Historians have interpreted the verdict in several ways. Sir D. L. Keir, “The Ship Money Case”, Law Quarterly Review, lii (1936), 546-74, argued that nine judges believed ship money was a legitimate charge on the subject, a tenth expressed no opinion, and only two judges supported Hampden on the main question. For a different view, however, see Conrad Russell, “The Ship Money Judgments of Bramston and Davenport”, English Historical Review, lxxvii (April, 1962), 312-18, who maintained that the judges divided evenly, 6-6, and that the crucial question was the definition of ship money as either a tax or a service. Of the two interpretations, I find Russell’s more convincing; Keir grouped nine judges who disagreed amongst themselves on certain crucial points.
² SP16/390/157.
The Council announced its willingness to prosecute to the Cheshire sheriff in June 1638. The next entry in Cholmondeley's letterbook was made in late October. Undoubtedly, in the interim, the sheriff redoubled his efforts to complete the 1637 levy and so satisfy the Council. Perhaps he was too busy and disheartened to maintain his diary. Finally, however, on 29 October 1638—in the very last month of his tenure of office—he was able to inform the Board that he had "now attained his desire...full observance of His Majesty's ship money". If the Council would examine his earlier certifications, they would find that the Cheshire levy was now completed.

Cholmondeley was probably overjoyed that his duties had been discharged and the business successfully managed. But, according to the Board's records, the account was not yet settled. An arrear of £20 remained, and the Council was definitely dissatisfied with Cholmondeley. He was not in the clear, even though his shrievalty had expired. In November 1638 the Council ordered the new sheriff to authorize Cholmondeley to collect the arrear. Failure to do so would necessitate Cholmondeley's appearance before the Board in London, to answer for his negligence.

The weary sheriff, however, was not even the culprit! He had paid the whole £2,740 required from the county. The £20 arrear remained from the city of Chester's portion of the levy, and he had no jurisdiction there. In December 1638 Cholmondeley informed the magistrates of the corporate town that although the Council's challenge was directed towards him as sheriff, he would consider the city responsible for its own arrear. Henceforth, Chester could answer the Board for its own negligence. Sir Thomas, now ex-sheriff, had finished with His Majesty's business.

Likewise, the letterbook was completed. An irritated letter to his "very dear friends", the Chester magistrates, concluded the near-diary "book of all the proceedings of all business of this year 1637". Perhaps Cholmondeley's chapter had ended, but

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1 Ibid. fol. 35.
2 Ibid. fol. 36; the Council's letter was dated 30 November 1638, about six weeks after Cholmondeley's shrievalty expired.
3 Ibid. fols. 28-28v; SP16/382/38.
4 Ryl. Eng. MS. 1091, fol. 37.
the story continued its familiar course: the Council hounded the city magistrates just as they had chided the sheriff, although not quite so relentlessly.¹

III

This analytical narrative of Cholmondeley's assessment and collection of 1637 ship money in Cheshire has sought to demonstrate the fatal weaknesses inherent in the administrative machinery which threatened at every moment to jeopardize the entire levy. While Sir Thomas's performance was open to reproach, it is also clear that the Council never understood the sheriff's particular difficulties, and hence was unable to support local agents effectively. Ultimately, both local and central administrators shared responsibility for the levy's failures.

The later levies, in 1638 and 1639, collapsed primarily because of malfunction in this cumbersome bureaucracy.² The very machinery irritated ratepayers. But many internal defects could have been avoided, or at least minimized, had the Privy Council initially planned more thoughtfully.

Better planning, although difficult, was possible. What, then, were the Board's alternatives to this unworkable system precariously hinged on the sheriff? Three options existed. The Council could have appointed special commissioners, as for parliamentary subsidies or for the forced loan in 1626-7. Or the levies could have been entrusted either to the justices of the peace, or to the lords and deputy lieutenants in the counties. In evaluating these alternative mechanisms, I will argue that limitations of early Stuart governance imperilled the entire ship money levy.

All discussion must begin with the central fact that the choice of the sheriff to assess and collect ship money was inappropriate. By the seventeenth century, the sheriff had long lost his medieval legal responsibilities.³ Technically, by then tax assessment fell within the purview of the justices, not of the sheriff.

¹ PC2/50/26; 16 January 1638/9, the arrear on the 1637 writ still remained.
² M. D. Gordon, "The Collection of Ship Money in the Reign of Charles I", TRHS, 3rd ser., iv (1910), 155-61. In 1638 Cheshire was assessed £1,150, which apparently was completely paid. In 1639, of the £3,000 assessed on the county palatine, only £1,200, or 40 per cent, was successfully collected.
³ W. Holdsworth, History of English Law, i. 68; iv. 122.
Furthermore, of all the innovations in the ship money levies, the unprecedented decision to proceed wholly through county sheriffs was the most debilitating. Under Elizabeth, lords lieutenant had actually assessed and collected ship money; the sheriff was not involved. In 1635, Edward Nicholas, Secretary of the Privy Council, had anticipated the problem of annual discontinuity that would necessarily arise from shrieval supervision. His memorandum on "some particulars to be considered . . . concerning the shipping business" noted

That as the assessments will be made in one sheriff's time and the levies in another, choice be made of well-affected men to be sheriffs for the next year . . .

Nicholas’s suggestion, that somehow the election of sheriffs should be carefully controlled, was hopelessly naive and inadequate. There were viable precedents for ship money, which the Crown ignored in favour of dangerous innovations.

To understand why the Council declined to appoint special commissioners requires a slight digression on the Caroline precedents for ship money. In general, historians have ignored King Charles's attempt to impose ship money in 1626. Certainly during the 1634-9 levies the King and Council persistently minimized, and nearly obliterated, the precedent. However, the 1626 levy is particularly germane for two reasons. Firstly, the hostility to ship money in 1626 reappeared in the later impositions, especially from 1637 to 1639. Secondly, the conceptual dilemma regarding the status of ship money, as manifested in the two schemes proposed in 1626, plagued the


2 SP16/535/74; undated, but probably sometime in May 1635.

3 Originally, the 1626 ship money, conceived in rather medieval fashion, relied heavily on London, the Cinque Ports, maritime towns, and private merchant shipping "volunteered" to the King, but actually commandeered by royal prerogative right. See SP16/255/19 and 348/24. The Londoners, however, were unwilling to provide the King with either ships or money; see T. Birch, *The Court and Times of Charles I*, i. 136-7, 139-40, 147-9, 150, 153. Sometime during 1626, Crown and Council altered the basis of the ship money levy. The new scheme (undated; v. SP16/516/42) encompassed the entire realm, not just maritime counties. All localities contributed money, not vessels. Therefore, this scheme was quite revolutionary, for it resembled neither the medieval press of private shipping nor Elizabethan voluntary contributions.
later Caroline impositions also. Every year ship money was levied, the same question arose: Was it a tax, or a contribution? The issue transcended semantics.

Although in 1640 the Grand Remonstrance complained about the "new, unheard-of tax of ship money", numerous precedents for such an imposition existed. Ship money was definitely a tax, paid into central treasury funds. But the King could not afford to admit openly in 1634-9 that he was levying an extra-parliamentary tax; therefore, he deliberately obscured the status of ship money. He claimed that he was requesting only a contribution from his subjects for the defence of the realm, but not a tax. The distinction, however, was not simply a technical nicety that Charles found expedient. What was ship money, a service or a tax? The two possible answers each implied a different relationship between the subject and the state, and these two rival conceptions were the crux of the lawyers' arguments in Hampden's Case.

Whatever advantages the King derived from obscuring the status of ship money would have been undermined by the appointment of special commissioners. This conceptual dilemma—whether a service or a tax—in part precluded the Privy Council's alternative of commissioning special officers. Indeed, the designation of special assessors and collectors would have been an impolitic _de facto_ admission by the Crown that ship money was truly a tax. The forced loan, euphemistically called

No writ has survived, so perhaps the scheme never materialized, although the Puritan squire Sir Walter Yonge of Devon noted that "the country did generally refuse to contribute" for ship money in 1626; see George Roberts, ed., _Diary of Walter Yonge, Esq._ (Camden Soc., xli (1848), 93.

1 Both prosecution and defence counsels in Hampden's Case explored precedents as old as Anglo-Saxon danegeld (see _State Trials_, iii. 825-1065, _passim._) The earliest precedent was King Ine, a.d. 725 (v. 1019).

2 This point is demonstrated by Conrad Russell, "The Ship Money Judgments of Bramston and Davenport", _EHR_, lxxvii (April, 1962), 312-18.

3 In 1634, the King requested the "contribution" of a 400T ship from Cheshire, Lancashire, and Cumberland. In return for the prompt payment of £2,204, His Majesty was "graciously pleased to lend [a ship] of his own" to the counties (v. PC2/44/346). The fiction of "lending" ships was maintained generally in 1635 also (v. Bankes Papers, 54/55, an order from Star Chamber, 6 November 1635).
the free gift, certainly had all the earmarks of direct taxation. Never repaid, it was virtually a subsidy without parliamentary sanction. Both the actual rates and the procedure for its collection were modelled on the subsidy.\(^1\) If in 1626-7 any Englishman extended to the King the benefit of the doubt, that the contribution was merely a benevolence or free gift, the appointment of special commissioners under the Great Seal soon dispelled the myth. These commissioners acquainted all eligible ratepayers—gentlemen and freeholders who appeared in the subsidy rolls, and all others "of ability" as well—with His Majesty's will. They then assessed these persons. Anyone who refused to subscribe was examined on oath, and finally, the names of all refusers and refractory persons were certified to the Council.\(^2\) Benevolence so defined by the King meant nothing less than the financial compulsion of his subjects.

Furthermore, the appointment of special commissioners for ship money would have formalized and institutionalized the imposition, an appearance that the King could not risk. After all, in 1634, Charles needed an immediate expedient to meet the sudden dangers that then confronted the realm, or such at least was the impression the Crown struggled to create.\(^3\) Even if commissioners were called emergency collectors, the problem would have remained. The King's subjects might accept emergency, but would they accept special collectors? Money so gathered implied taxation, even if only an emergency levy, despite the King's effort to create contrary appearances. And any taxation during the 1630s was, in the absence of the assembly, extraparliamentary. Hostility to ship money in fact was aggravated only after the imposition had become a permanent, fixed feature of governance, when the makeshift administrative system


\(^2\) Idem.

\(^3\) The Crown decided to bolster support for its policy of maritime supremacy by a propaganda campaign. In 1633 Sir John Borough, Keeper of the Records in the Tower, produced a tract, *Dominium Maris Brittanici*. In 1634 a seaman named Nathaniel Knott linked England's maritime supremacy with the immediate need for defence against piracy; see above, p. 143, n. 3. In 1635 King Charles commissioned the publication of Selden's *Mare Clausum* (which had been written in 1618 in reply to Grotius).
of assessment and collection by sheriffs could no longer conceal that the imposition was an extraparliamentary tax.

But the Council did not sufficiently appreciate the principal advantage of special commissioners. Any scheme to levy ship money incurred disadvantages; the only ideal mechanism was none at all. If Charles was determined to press ship money on his subjects, then the system designed would simply represent the choice of lesser evils. The appointment of special commissioners would have provided three essential advantages: (1) exclusive concentration of time and energy on ship money, (2) expertise in assessment, and (3) experienced collectors. Given the numerous innovative features of ship money—its broadened tax base, the liability of both personal and real property—professional experience and functional specialization were absolutely necessary for the levy's success. A new, progressive tax required a progressive bureaucracy; any adaptation of existing institutions would from the outset compromise the imposition. Old bottles would make any new wine stale. The reliance on old rates for other taxations, the adaptation of inappropriate mechanisms, produced the patchwork machinery that left gaps in ship money assessment and collection.

The Council's second alternative, to entrust the ship money levies to the justices of the peace, offered several advantages. The justices were the only local officials with legal authority to coerce; therefore, they could prosecute resistance to ship money locally, and more immediately, within each county. As it was, sheriffs and Privy Council never effectively punished many resisters. The sheriff's authority to distrain and imprison issued from the King's ship money writ, not from the general scope of the office (whereas the justices' intimate role in local tax assessment and collection of poor relief combined administrative duties of their office with their legal powers.) Actual litigation concerning ship money defaulters was referred to the Privy Council in London, and very few refractory persons were ever subjected to proceedings either before the Board or in Star Chamber. Faced with local irritation to ship money, the sheriff was extremely reluctant to imprison his fellow countrymen.

1 On J.P.s, see Holdsworth, op. cit. iv. 134-51, 541-68.
The sheriff of Shropshire, for example, complained to the Board that he "was hit in the teeth by the county for being too hasty in levying the money". In 1640 the sheriff of Oxfordshire found his county "generally resolutely bent against... the ship money service", and he "dared not distrain, being so threatened with suits and hazards of his life, he had rather undergo punishment for refusing to do his office". Many sheriffs lamented that the inevitable delays and distant punishment of refractory persons by the Council in London served only to encourage additional opposition in the counties. For example, a protracted rating dispute in Oxfordshire between rival jurisdictions of two hundreds and two corporate towns therein, incited other resistance "until... the outcome of the [controversy] is seen". Similarly, Cholmondeley in Cheshire alleged that ratepayers held back their monies while they awaited the outcome of a ship money case before the judges. Theoretically, supervision of the levy by justices of the peace might at least expedite adjudication; the simple threat and proximity of swift retribution could intimidate many who were in effect merely swept into the vortex of resistance. Difficulties in shrieval collection did in fact draw the justices into the administration of ship money. The Council itself usually referred assessment dispute to men of local prominence, often justices of the peace, for arbitration.

Furthermore, justices were responsible for revision of tax lists. And to make ship money the progressive, equitable levy King Charles desired, wholesale reform of assessment was urgently necessary. When the Cheshire sheriff made new assessments in 1639-40, the long overdue reform was futile. (Without complete revision of rates in all counties, ship money

1 SP16/350/21.
2 SP16/468/31.
3 SP16/361/25.
4 SP16/390/157; 28 May 1638.
5 SP16/380/5.
6 SP16/445/24: "...in regard of personal estates of men then living there, but now dead or removed, against which grievance the county in general protests, and for which I was forced to promise redress by a new division of the whole county... Though this reassessment be for the good of all... yet it will not be pleasing to those townships... now underrated... I... petition for a longer time to pay this money in..."
degenerated into another land tax, still assessed according to inadequate fifteenth-century rates.)

Although justices of the peace supervised other taxes for poor relief, highway repair, maintenance of gaols and hospitals, they did not collect ship money. In effect, ship money utilized the traditional machinery for assessment and collection, through constables, but replaced the justice—the county's principal tax officer—with the sheriff. Why? The answer lay in the politics of the 1630s.

Unless the King were willing to summon parliament, he could levy ship money only by writ, and not by statute (the customary procedure with other taxes). Obviously Charles wanted to avoid both the assembly and the admission that ship money was a tax. In fact he probably considered the levy by royal writ an opportunity to escape from an awkward political dilemma. Because the sheriff was the local officer whose duty was to execute the king's writs, Charles could circumvent parliament, special commissioners, and justices as well. Perhaps this was the most useful innovation of the entire scheme. From the King's viewpoint, the shrieval connection with ship money was highly expedient.

A crucial question, however, remains. Once the sheriff had served the writ, justices traditionally would have supervised assessment and collection independently. Why did the King and Council assign the justices' responsibilities to the sheriff? For various reasons, this substitution was definitely inexpedient. First, the very innovation aroused suspicion. Recourse to royal writ in taxation was highly irregular; in fact, this novelty provided the basis for Hampden's challenge to the legality of ship money. Constant scepticism regarding the sheriff's authority in tax matters jeopardized the levy. Secondly, the

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1 Idem, which demonstrated the inflexibility of the old rates. Removals and deaths frequently went unadjusted.
2 C. V. Wedgewood, The King's Peace, p. 156, erroneously states that ship money "was collected by justices of the peace and delivered to the sheriffs of the counties...".
3 State Trials, iii. 880-90 passim, 855-6, 863.
4 PC2/45/301 and SP16/305/19, where the sheriff's right to investigate the constables' certifications of the ship money rates was questioned.
seventeenth-century sheriff lacked both authority and experience in taxation, the province of the justices. Ship money levies by design evaded the available expertise. For example, the Privy Council informed the sheriff of Essex in 1635 that if persons "refused to produce their books and rates for other services", for reference in determining ship money assessments, he would consult "the parson, churchwardens, constables, and surveyors of the highways": in short, everyone except the justices directly.¹

Possibly the Council anticipated some disadvantages from the administration of ship money by justices of the peace. To give already overworked justices additional responsibilities might jeopardize law and order in the entire county community. A second possible objection was especially serious from the King's viewpoint. To expand the justices' responsibilities for ship money would undesirably have transferred the imposition into the realm of law and adjudication. That is, since Charles claimed, with considerable justification, that he was merely demanding a service or contribution from his subjects, by authority of his royal prerogative, the Crown had no need at all for adjudication. In fact, until Hampden's Case ship money was, from the Crown's standpoint, never really a legal question at all; instead this imposition was the King's prerogative right, if not duty. Demandable services indeed fell within the purview of the law, but the law was weighted on the King's side and the subject had little choice but to proffer them.

Although the conceptual-political dilemma over the status of ship money somewhat circumscribed the feasibility of special commissioners or justices, these options were still possible. Furthermore, a third and more reasonable alternative existed: to entrust ship money to the lords and deputy lieutenants. Naturally these officers supervised military taxations such as coat and conduct money. And since the Crown had justified ship money partly as military necessity, the lords lieutenant were, logically, the most qualified administrators of this new imposition. Under Elizabeth they had actually collected ship money.² But

¹ SP16/305/14.
inexplicably, the Council ignored this third, cogently viable possibility, in favour of an unworkable and cumbersome bureaucracy. In the feverish search for ancient precedents, the King and Council had curiously overlooked the most useful ones! Charles's myopia belied important miscalculations. Moreover, in 1634 or 1636 no one could have foreseen any dangerous connection between this extraparliamentary imposition and its military potential, or that the crucial issue which culminated in the constitutional crisis between King and Parliament would focus on control over the militia.

Since the Privy Council's membership remained fairly constant throughout the 1630s, these central administrators might easily have remedied any perceived defects in ship money machinery. As early as 1635 Secretary Nicholas had anticipated, albeit superficially, other problems besides annual discontinuity of shrieval supervision. He specifically recommended

That the assessment may be directed not only to sheriffs of counties, mayors, bailiffs, etc. of towns, but also to the deputy lieutenants or justices of the peace of each division in every county.2

Nicholas's purpose was not simply to satisfy local officials' curiosity. Rather, his suggestion reflected the King's insistence that ship money was absolutely necessary for the defence of the realm. The implication, then, was that deputy lieutenants and justices of the peace should be concerned with the ship levies. Curiously, however, only the first half of Nicholas's idea was actually translated into the machinery for assessment and collection.

Perhaps the Council's decisions against commissioners or justices were wise, but was the rejection of lords lieutenant justified? I think not. Serious but not insurmountable disadvantages attached to other options, but the exclusion of lords lieutenant suggested inadequate, myopic planning. By avoiding difficult choices, the Privy Council invited the levy's

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1 As recently as 1628, Sir John Borough had ignored the valuable Elizabethan precedents and concentrated instead on early medieval ones. See B.L. Add. MS. 34324, fols. 269-74v, extract from Tower Records, c. Edward I, on means of raising money for a navy. The list, dated 24 January 1627/8, fails to mention any method remotely resembling ship money. See also SP16/276/65, in 1634.

2 SP16/535/74.
failure. The Council saddled the county sheriff—the inappropriate officer for tax collection—with overwhelming responsibilities and an inadequate mechanism by which to fulfil those duties. The ship money levy provides eloquent commentary on the deficiencies of conciliar government in early Stuart England. The imposition amounted to little more than a series of makeshift expedients and innovations, without necessary reform or bureaucratic co-ordination of local and central administrative efforts.

Furthermore, from the standpoint of local administration, Hampden's Case in 1637-8 had a devastating effect on ship money collection. In nearly every county arrears on the 1638 and 1639 levies soared dramatically. Although there is little evidence of direct influence, Hampden's Case probably altered Englishmen's perceptions of ship money significantly, if only because of the immense publicity the Case acquired during its lengthy prosecution before the Courts. In terms of heightened contemporary interest, Hampden's Case may be considered the apex of the ship money controversy:

The business now talked on in town is all about the question of ship money. The King is pleased to give way to those subjects that refuse to pay, whereof John Hampden is one, to have their counsel argue the case in point of law in the Exchequer Chamber before all the judges, and Mr. St. John hath already argued for the subject very bravely and boldly. Yesterday was the first on the King's part. I cannot relate any particulars because I heard it not. Although I was up by peep of the day to that purpose, I was so far from getting into the room that I could not get near the door by two or three yards, the crowd was so great.

An analysis of Hampden's Case lies beyond the scope of this article. The ramifications of the Ship Money Case were not exploited until 1640, in the Short and Long Parliaments (by the

1 M. D. Gordon, op. cit., from which the following figures are taken: slightly more than 1 per cent of the 1634 imposition remained in arrears; the sums outstanding for 1635 equalled 2 5/9 per cent; for 1636, 3 1/3 per cent; for 1637, 9 per cent. Although the total amount due under the 1638 writs (£69,750) decreased almost 66 per cent from the imposition in 1636 and 1637 (£196,400), the arrears for 1638 rose to 26 per cent. The final imposition of ship money in 1639 demanded a total assessment of £210,400, the highest of the Caroline series, of which £166,983, or approximately 79 per cent, remained uncollected.

very defendant and his coterie!). Nevertheless, the sudden explosion of parliamentary opposition to the constitutionality of ship money cannot be fully understood unless the mundane details of assessment and collection are exposed.

Torn between his duties as the Crown's officer and his ties to the local community, the sheriff found the imposition of royal authority in the county an unwelcome responsibility, and by 1640 a nearly impossible task. All structural stress of the chain of command in the ship money bureaucracy converged on the vulnerable middleman, the sheriff. Many local administrators testified to their conflicting dual allegiances. The sheriff of Rutland, for example, informed Secretary Nicholas that "were it not for His Majesty's command, no profit or reward could draw him to adventure upon such business again".¹ One of Cholmondeley's successors in Cheshire, Sir Thomas Powell, eloquently conveyed the isolation a conscientious administrator could experience. Powell had imprisoned a constable for neglect and obstruction of the King's service, but influential county gentry who patronized the constable sought to undermine ship money collection, and the sheriff could not rely on support from the Privy Council:

The justices of the peace of that faction will, at their sessions, prefer bills of indictment against me and my under officers who stir at all in the levy of this ship money, and therefore if we be not well backed up by His Majesty and the Board, in our proceedings according to his writ and their instructions, I and all my agents will be utterly discouraged.²

Frequently the sheriff was a helpless victim, caught between the hostility of his neighbours and the capriciousness of the Privy Council in London.

Furthermore, the sheriff was an inappropriate officer to collect taxes. Traditionally justices supervised taxation at quarter sessions, the legal forum of the county. The sheriff had neither sufficient authority or means to enforce the ship money levy.

¹ SP16/351/37, 29 March 1637.
² SP16/459/21. Also 16/450/28, when Powell complained: "it vexes me not a little that I should, on the one side, be thought negligent or remiss in case I levy not ship money with the speed that is expected, and on the other side, be accounted too officious, and a pick-thank, if I inform against those of my neighbours and countrymen here...".
Cholmondeley's daily problems in Cheshire in 1637 were worlds removed from the principled rhetoric of parliamentary speeches in 1640. Yet if the Privy Council had sympathized more with local administrators, overhauled the entire mechanism, and reformed the basis of ship money assessments, then perhaps the King might well have avoided the humiliating rejection of his offer to abolish the imposition in return for £120,000.1 Because no necessary reform was achieved, the King's eleventh-hour concession could not stave off indictment of his governance. The history of the ship money levies from 1634 until 1639 demonstrated the real bankruptcy of leadership by King and Council.

1 The Lord Keeper strove to argue in the Short Parliament that the King never intended to make ship money an annual tax, or to profit personally. See Northants RO: Finch-Hatton 50, fols. 50-52, 60-62. Apparently the King's offer, to relinquish ship money for twelve subsidies, was made about 4 May 1640 (v. Hunts RO: Manchester MS. 3611, Diary of Robert Bernard). The king expected a positive reply, but debate on the proposal was acrimonious and hostile. Charles precipitously dissolved Parliament on 5 May, but generously admitted that "I cannot blame all the lower house, but some only, disaffected persons and stuffed with ill will". (I am grateful to Mr. Conrad Russell for this reference). Reference was made to the King's plan to exchange ship money for twelve subsidies in the Grand Remonstrance.
RUTH was Mrs. Gaskell's second full-scale novel, and of all her novels it is perhaps the one which excites least interest in her modern readers. Published in 1853, some five years after the appearance of Mary Barton, and written concurrently with much of Cranford, it seems to evade the categories suggested by both of those works, and it is perhaps inevitable that traditionalist admirers of Mrs. Gaskell's novels of provincial society and the more sociologically orientated enthusiasts of her industrial fiction have both tended to neglect it. As a social-problem novel concerned with the issue of unmarried motherhood Ruth seems to deal with what modern social attitudes profess to see as no problem at all, while as a novel of social observation it seems too heavily committed to its overtly propagandist stance. Thus it is that a recent commentator can remark that

A real effort of critical imagination is needed to do justice to Mrs. Gaskell's intentions and artistic execution in Ruth.¹

This is not to say, however, that such an effort will prove unrewarding, and, if indeed there is much in the novel that today we find naive or even mawkish, there is also much to admire, and much that represents new possibilities for its author's development as a novelist. Furthermore, the differences

¹ Margaret Ganz, Elizabeth Gaskell: The Artist in Conflict (New York, 1969), p. 105. Cf. J. G. Sharps, Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention (London, 1970), p. 152: "Yet, as far as its central theme is concerned, Ruth is not artistically a success: invention fails in its attempt to come to the aid of morality". Notwithstanding their reservations, Ganz and Sharps do discuss Ruth in detail while, amongst other commentators, Arthur Pollard devotes a full chapter to the novel (Mrs. Gaskell, Novelist and Biographer (Manchester, 1965), pp. 86-107). Outside the specialized field of Gaskell studies, however, it has received far less attention. In this respect it is interesting to note that a chapter entitled "The Theme of Seduction" in a recent study of Hardy fails to mention it at all in an examination of Victorian precursors of Tess of the D'Urbervilles (see Merryn Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, London, 1972).
between *Ruth* and Mrs. Gaskell’s other novels, differences which, in the case of *Mary Barton* she herself stressed,¹ are, as I shall suggest in the course of this article, largely superficial: in many ways it has far more in common with Mrs. Gaskell’s other major fiction than has been generally acknowledged.

If our own critical preoccupations have tended to minimize the importance of *Ruth* amongst Mrs. Gaskell’s novels, they scarcely represent the feelings of its author, or the eagerness with which it was received by her contemporaries.

Long have we been looking for some new manifestation of the genius of the authoress of *Mary Barton*: and now that that is before us, we welcome it with joy and become familiar with it without disappointment, wrote an anonymous reviewer in *Bentley’s Miscellany*, a judgement echoed by his counterpart in *The English Review*:

The author of "*Mary Barton*"... could scarcely add to her reputation; it is much to say that she has not detracted from it.² Notices such as these presumably did something to dispel Mrs. Gaskell’s own anxiety about having dared to deal explicitly with such a sensitive issue: always conscious, when dealing with such topics, of the potential conflict between her artistic commitment and her public role within her husband’s congregation, she seems to have gone through agonies of self-doubt about *Ruth’s* effect: "I have been so ill, I do believe it has been a ‘Ruth’ fever", she writes to her friend, Eliza Fox, and continues

Now should you have burnt the 1st vol. of Ruth as so very bad?... Yet two men have; and a third has forbidden his wife to read it, they sit next to us in Chapel and you can’t think how ‘improper’ I feel under their eyes.³

Elsewhere she compares herself to "St. Sebastian tied to a tree

¹ In a post-script to a letter to her sister-in-law, Anne Robson, written at the time of *Ruth*’s publication, Mrs. Gaskell writes: “I myself, don’t see how Mary B. and Ruth can be compared. They are so different in subject, style, number of characters &c.—everything, and made different partly that people might not compare them, but take each for the good that was in them” (*The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, ed. J. A. V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (Manchester, 1966), p. 222 (hereafter referred to as *Letters*)). I suspect in this instance that Mrs. Gaskell, anxious to avoid a reputation for deliberately dealing with provocative themes, protests too much.


³ *Letters*, pp. 222-3.
to be shot at with arrows” and makes the revealing admission that

Of course it is a prohibited book in this, as in many other households; not a book for young people, unless read with someone older (I mean to read it with MA some quiet time or other.).

As with Mary Barton then, Mrs. Gaskell had chosen a theme which was to prove potentially explosive, and in the case of Ruth she was even more convinced that she was in the right: there are none of the defensive suggestions of artistic inadequacy with which she protects herself in Mary Barton, and if her letters at this time indicate distress at criticism this is paralleled by the delight with which she announces a more sympathetic response:

Three or four men have written to approve... two with testimony as valuable as fathers of families... I think I have put the small edge of the wedge in, if only I have made people talk & discuss the subject a little more than they did.

Much of Mrs. Gaskell’s discomfort would seem to have been occasioned by the direct reactions of personal acquaintances and connections within the Manchester Unitarian circle. The portrait of the unrelenting utilitarian moralist, Bradshaw, in Ruth would thus seem to have had a certain ironic appropriateness. Certainly there was some public criticism, and a predictable lack of detachment from a number of the reviews, but on balance Mrs. Gaskell could scarcely have been distressed by the kind of reception which Ruth attracted, and more than one of her reviewers made a special point of congratulating her on the tact with which she had presented such difficult material.

For example, after calling the novel “an inexpressibly beautiful and touching story” The Guardian went on to make what is, in more than one way, the crucial point about the novel’s heroine:

...her guilt is as little as can ever exist in such a case. Yet all through the book... she is never suffered to forget her fall, nor are we ever either... it is as the humble self-distrusting penitent... that she wins our respect and love.

I suggest that there are moments in Ruth where artistic intuition

1 Letters, p. 221. “MA” is Mrs. Gaskell’s eldest daughter, Marianne.
2 Letters, p. 226.
3 For an analysis of the reception of Ruth by the reviews see Annette B. Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell, Her Life and Work (London, 1952), pp. 124-7.
4 The Guardian, 2 February 1853.
is at odds with its author's moralistic purpose, but basically the comment here is much to the point. Mrs. Gaskell's courage where *Ruth* was concerned consisted of openly discussing what was held to be best concealed, and suggesting an amelioration of the law of cause and effect that repaid the sinner with damnation. The guilt may be deliberately minimized but it is never denied, and the reader who goes to *Ruth* in the hope of finding a morally agnostic attitude to its heroine's early lapse is as likely as not to be repelled by the penance which Mrs. Gaskell has in store for her. "Why should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?" asked Charlotte Brontë, a question which we are liable to extend to include the entire life-pattern which Mrs. Gaskell creates for Ruth after her rescue by the Bensons—a dissenting pastor and his sister, who providentially come upon her at the moment of her desertion—and her installation as the recipient of their kindness. Ruth's situation is in fact not so much an issue in itself as the instrument by which Mrs. Gaskell is able to dramatize her wider theme of the proper conduct of human relationships within the context of a meaningful Christian ethic, a concern which aligns the novel naturally with *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. The sequence of events involving the Bradshaw family, for instance, far from being in the nature of a sub-plot, is thus integral to the novel as a whole: the nemesis of the inflexible moralist is a theme which Mrs. Gaskell had used in *Mary Barton* and was to use again in *North and South*. Indeed, although contemporary opinion seems to have admired Ruth Hilton as a successful character portrayal, one suspects that this was to a large extent due to the rather unique way in which she fulfilled its idealization of, on the one hand the penitent sinner, and on the other the devoted mother, for on more than one occasion Mrs. Gaskell seems to deprive her of fictional vitality at the very point where she takes on an individuality of her own.

There is one further factor that must be taken into account in a preliminary discussion of *Ruth*. The situation of the fallen woman was one to which Mrs. Gaskell returned with what seems

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to us an almost obsessional regularity. The pattern was set by the story of Esther in *Mary Barton*, it was repeated in the short story *Lizzie Leigh*, which Mrs. Gaskell wrote for the first issue of *Household Words* in 1850, while the moral exposure of adolescent girls is, in various ways, a crucial element in *Sylvia's Lovers, Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters*, of the major fiction alone.\(^1\) There can be no doubt that Mrs. Gaskell's own position as the mother of four daughters, two of whom were nineteen and sixteen respectively when *Ruth* was published, and all of whom grew into womanhood while her career as a novelist developed, was a factor in her recurrence to these themes. Ruth Hilton, we are told early in the novel

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. . . \text{was too young when her mother died to have received any cautions or words of advice respecting the subject of a woman's life—if, indeed, wise parents ever directly speak of what, in its depth and power, cannot be put into words—which is a brooding spirit with no definite form or shape that men should know it, but which is there, and present before we have recognised and realised its existence (chapter 3, p. 43).}\(^2\)
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The terminological evasions are revealing ("I mean to read it with MA some quiet time or other") in the way they show how much Mrs. Gaskell had to overcome in herself in writing this novel: against this kind of linguistic imprecision the dramatic effectiveness of the scenes in North Wales where Ruth herself is revealed to be living with Bellingham, her aristocratic seducer, is all the more marked. For some Victorian authors one suspects that the theme of illegitimacy, significant perhaps psychologically in terms of their domestic values, was to a large extent remote from their living experience. For Mrs. Gaskell the emergence of feminine sexuality was part of her experience as a mother, and it is this experience which has such marked effects, both good and bad, for her fiction. And if, at this point, one may make the obvious comparison with *Adam Bede*, it is perhaps worth

\(^1\) It is worth mentioning that Mrs. Gaskell's obsession, if so it can be called, proved damaging when it expressed itself on two occasions in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Both references were amongst the material that had to be amended in the revised third edition of the work.

\(^2\) All page references to the novel which follow are to the Knutsford Edition of the *Works* of Mrs. Gaskell, London, 1906, volume iii, of which *Ruth* forms the major part.
suggesting that in one important aspect Mrs. Gaskell’s maternal experiences work to her advantage: the lack of charity (to put it bluntly) that George Eliot shows to Hetty Sorel is something from which Mrs. Gaskell’s more practical, if more sentimentalist, ethic has at least saved her.

II

Structurally, and indeed qualitatively, *Ruth* is an uneven novel. At times the reader finds himself irresistibly drawn into the crises of Ruth Hilton’s career; nevertheless such involvement tends to alternate with a sense of labour, sometimes even of embarrassment, as the novel reverts to the course of domesticated regeneration which Mrs. Gaskell ordains for her heroine. The contrast is most marked by the beginning and end of the novel: the chapters set in North Wales in which we see Ruth Hilton enjoying, and then losing, the attentions of Henry Bellingham, set a standard which Mrs. Gaskell finds difficult to sustain, whereas the melodramatic final chapters, in which Ruth sacrifices herself in the service of others when acting as sick-nurse in a cholera epidemic and, in a situation the irony of which can only be described as grotesque, dies as a result of nursing her old lover, are such as even contemporary readers seem to have found difficult to take.¹

Mrs. Gaskell’s difficulties are the result, not so much of awkwardness in the writing of the novel as such—it is worth remarking that her handling of her supporting cast, the Bensons and the Bradshaws, and even of peripheral characters like the servant, Sally, and Bradshaw’s partner, Farquhar, scarcely falters—as of what she makes of Ruth Hilton herself during the fourteen years of her life with which the novel is concerned. There is indeed an elementary difficulty in her basic conception of the character. From the outset Mrs. Gaskell is on the defensive where Ruth Hilton is concerned. She always sees her as being in a position of dependence, whether on the kindness of others or, ultimately, on her own regeneration, and however

¹ Ganz cites the specific objection of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to the ending of the novel (op. cit. p. 271) and the more generalized objections of George Eliot and Clough to Mrs. Gaskell’s handling of her material (ibid. p. 108).
tactfully that regeneration is handled we are inevitably left with a heroine whose qualities must display themselves within the limitations of a self-admonishing quietism. The code is established as soon as Ruth begins her life with the Bensons where, under the influence of their tenour of life, she submits not only to their kindness but to the crueller rebukes implicit in the behaviour of their servant. Self-examination begins almost immediately, as for example when, at the birth of her child, she reflects on his father’s true nature:

Slight speeches, telling of a selfish, worldly nature, unnoticed at the time, came back upon her ear, having a new significance. They told of a low standard, of impatient self-indulgence, of no acknowledgement of things spiritual and heavenly (chapter 15, pp. 161-2).

The reassessment of Bellingham is, of course, a reassessment of Ruth’s own response to him, and Mrs. Gaskell explains this capacity for self-criticism by Ruth’s new situation—“the new spirit of maternity that had entered into her and made her child’s welfare supreme”. In its immediate context the change is rendered further credible by the careful building-up of the good effect of the Benson ménage, but in the wider context of the novel as a whole the shift to this moralistic equanimity on the part of its heroine is less satisfactory. It is, after all, only twelve months since Ruth’s initial involvement with Bellingham when, in order to minimize the degree of her responsibility in the affair, Mrs. Gaskell was at pains to emphasize her lack of experience, even childishness in human affairs. Dramatic developments of moral awareness are a commonplace of the nineteenth-century novel, but the most indulgent of readers must surely feel that in Ruth’s case there is something rather magical about the baby Leonard’s effect.

Once Ruth’s life with the Bensons has begun, her path is clear, and the chances of the kind of conflict that makes for dramatization of character are, on the face of it, minimal. There are, indeed, important moments of moral choice ahead of Ruth, as in the case of her involvement with the Bradshaw family as governess and even as confidante, when she knows that she is compromised by her past, and such incidents provide opportunities for the kind of dramatization of moral scruple at which
Mrs. Gaskell excels. There is also the somewhat fortuitous re-entry of Bellingham into her life, an issue which, as I shall suggest, contributes to a major query about Mrs. Gaskell’s conception of Ruth’s character. Incidents such as these are validly used to show the extent to which Ruth’s development is one of increasing strength and quality of character. The basic pattern, though, is one of self-denial, and in so far as that self-denial implicitly involves the rejection of the possibility of a love-relationship (we never really believe that Ruth will become involved with Bradshaw’s manager, Farquhar, as at one stage Mrs. Gaskell seems rather vicariously to suggest) Ruth Hilton’s history is one with which the form of the Victorian novel was not well-equipped to deal.

It is here, too, that the time-scale of the novel makes for a further difficulty. As I have said, the novel covers fourteen years of Ruth’s life, and it does so in a way that keeps the reader constantly aware, in a special sense, of the need to keep his eye on the time. Indeed Mrs. Gaskell herself is aware of this need, regularly reminding us of the passage of time, but, however skilfully she manages to suggest changes in the characters surrounding the heroine, there is an inevitably static quality about Ruth herself. When we are told, for example, that Ruth appeared to Farquhar as “the very type of what a woman should be—a calm serene soul, fashioning the body to angelic grace” (chapter 25, p. 305) we are aware not only of the sentimentalized values implicit in the language—it is in fact a tribute to Mrs. Gaskell’s skill in this novel that she gets away with so much in this direction—but of the limitations which such a conception implies for the central character of a three-volume novel.

There is, finally, a further source of embarrassment. Mrs. Gaskell certainly manages to persuade us of the excellence of Ruth herself, in spite of her rather frequent recourse to the language of Victorian sentiment, but our tolerance is stretched, I suspect, by her deliberate authorial intrusions, and the situation of Ruth, and indeed the explicitly evangelical purpose of the novel as a whole, is such as to induce such interpolations distressingly frequently. I have referred earlier to the consequences for her fiction of Mrs. Gaskell’s concerns as a mother, and here it
has to be said that these work to her disadvantage, whether she is dealing with Ruth's memories of her own mother, or with her experiences as a mother herself. Significantly, in the light of Mrs. Gaskell's own experience, Ruth has an obsessional anxiety about her child's safety,¹ and it is perhaps here that Mrs. Gaskell's failure to detach herself from the fictional situation is most evident:

Her whole heart was in her boy. She often feared that she loved him too much—more than God himself—yet she could not bear to pray to have her love for her child lessened. But she would kneel down by his little bed at night—at the deep still midnight—with the stars that kept watch over Rizpah shining down upon her, and tell God what I have now told you, that she feared she loved her child too much, yet could not, would not love him less; and speak to Him of her one treasure as she could speak to no earthly friend. And so, unconsciously, her love for her child led her up to love of God, to the All-knowing who read her heart (chapter 19, p. 207).²

The sincerity of such a passage is unquestionable—and it is important to remember that the ultimate intention of the novel is an affirmation of true Christianity. Its tone, however, is rather less so, and it is a tone which we meet fairly regularly during the course of the novel.

III

There is much, then, about Ruth which would seem to suggest that if it is now a neglected novel, this is no more than it deserves. As so often with Mrs. Gaskell, however, concentration on her weaknesses produces an analysis which is at odds

¹ Mrs. Gaskell's infant son, William, died of scarlet fever in 1845 when only ten months old, while the Gaskells were on holiday in North Wales, but it is interesting to note that even before this, in the diary which she kept of the infancy of her first child, Marianne, Mrs. Gaskell refers to her fear that the child might suffer an early death: "She is, I think, a small child, and I fear not a very strong one. We hope to take her to the seaside this spring. Oh! may I constantly bear in mind the words 'The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'" (My Diary: The Early Years of My Daughter Marianne (privately printed by Clement Shorter, London, 1923), pp. 19-20). (My Diary covers the period from March 1835 to October 1838).

² Again it is interesting to compare this passage with the following from My Diary: "Lord! unto thee do I commit this darling precious treasure; thou knowest how much I love her; I pray that I may not make her too much my idol" (My Diary, p. 17). Sharps (op. cit. p. 152) has commented on another point at which the novel seems to recall the earlier fragment.
with the sense of pleasure which we receive from reading the
ovels themselves, and in the case of *Ruth* there is much to
justify the valuation placed upon it by the more discriminating
of Mrs. Gaskell’s contemporaries. In the first place the ethos
which Ruth’s career is organized to demonstrate is presented
with a subtlety and tact which scarcely get their due from
reductive analysis. Ruth, whether living in the morally and
psychologically therapeutic environment of the Benson house-
hold or reacting to the contrasting atmosphere of the Bradshaw
ménage, is always alive and aware, never the object-lesson that
description of her situation tends to suggest. If the conception
of Ruth’s character is static, the presentation gives it flesh and
blood. Furthermore, there are times in Ruth’s career when that
presentation seems interestingly at odds with the basic conception.
Indeed, as in *Mary Barton*, where one feels a tension between
Mrs. Gaskell’s explicit condemnation of working-class violence
and her sympathy for the suffering which produces it, one senses
that at crucial moments in *Ruth* the imagination, perhaps even
the sympathy, of the artist, is at odds with the preconceived
moral purpose.

The conflict I am suggesting seems to me to come to the fore
in two protracted and highly significant episodes in Ruth’s career,
where the reader is directly exposed to the reality of her relation-
ship with Bellingham. There is, as most critics have noted,
much that is unsatisfactory about the relationship, if indeed it is
allowed to exist explicitly as such within the novel at all.
Bellingham himself is a typical example of the rich and idle
young man to whom the daughters of the subservient are simply
objects of pleasure, and one scarcely needs to compare him with
Arthur Donnithorne in *Adam Bede*, let alone with Dickens’s
Steerforth, to realize how much of a type, and how little of a
character, he is. Mrs. Gaskell, to be fair, does not have the same
degree of interest in him as do George Eliot and Dickens in their
respective paratypes: he is there simply as the agent of Ruth’s
downfall, and the mechanical contrivance by means of which he
is re-introduced later in the novel is a measure of Mrs. Gaskell’s
lack of interest in him in other than the crudest narrative, and
perhaps sociological, terms.
What is interesting is Ruth’s reaction to Bellingham, and here Mrs. Gaskell finds herself in considerable difficulty. As I have indicated, she goes out of her way to emphasize Ruth’s innocence and naivety at the beginning of the novel, as a means of minimizing her responsibility in the affair with Bellingham: it is only after she has been deserted that she begins to recognize his true character. The approach is familiar enough, but it still leaves a major problem: however Mrs. Gaskell may try to justify Ruth’s lapse it is difficult to associate such an error of judgement with someone whom we are for the rest of the novel asked to accept as possessing almost instinctive moral perception. Comparison with *Adam Bede* again makes the point: Hetty Sorel’s seduction is a direct consequence of her shallow-mindedness, of her fatal tendency towards flirtatiousness that turns her away from Adam himself. And George Eliot’s moral certitude being what it is, Hetty is punished and Adam is saved. In *Ruth* the situation is very different; it is almost, in fact, as if we were asked to believe that in a moment of immaturity Dinah Morris had run off with the squire.

The point is made not to be facetious but to suggest that there is more to Ruth’s situation than her creator’s direct instructions to the reader tend to suggest. There is nothing more remarkable in *Ruth*, perhaps in all of Mrs. Gaskell’s fiction, than those chapters early in the novel which precede Ruth’s career of regeneration, when we see her living with her lover in North Wales, and positively enjoying the experience. It is this section of the book, one suspects, that caused offence to William Gaskell’s congregation, rather than the subject-matter as a whole, for the spontaneity of Ruth’s feelings at this stage communicates itself to the reader with a force that temporarily makes nonsense of Bellingham’s own limitations as a fictional character, and which raises reverberations that carry throughout the remainder of the novel.

The kind of enjoyment I am referring to on Ruth’s part is conveyed, of course, not in terms of direct sexual pleasure, but through the empathy with nature which she feels during her stay in Wales, and which acts almost as an index to the emancipation of spirit which she experiences. We are, of course, left in no
doubt of Bellingham’s fundamental worthlessness, but curiously
this tends to emphasize the ambiguity that surrounds the
presentation of Ruth herself: her feelings of freedom, of pleasure
in her situation, come from within herself, and it is therefore all
the more unconvincing when they disappear as soon as she begins
her new life. Here, for instance, she is persuaded by Bellingham
to observe her own reflection in a pool:

She obeyed, and could not help seeing her own loveliness; it gave her a sense
of satisfaction for an instant, as the sight of any other beautiful object would have
done, but she never thought of associating it with herself. She knew that she was
beautiful; but that seemed abstract, and removed from herself. Her existence
was in feeling and thinking, and loving.

Down in that green hollow they were quite in harmony. Her beauty was all
that Mr. Bellingham cared for, and it was supreme. It was all he recognised of
her, and he was proud of it. She stood in her white dress against the trees which
grew around; her face was flushed into a brilliancy of colour which resembled
that of a rose in June; the great, heavy, white flowers drooped on either side of
her beautiful head, and if her brown hair was a little disordered, the very disorder
seemed only to add a grace (chapter 6, pp. 73-74).

The situation, in which the wider moral context of Ruth’s position
seems temporarily suspended while she is presented as a child of
nature, is not allowed to last for long and within a paragraph the
moralizing qualification is introduced: “She became pensive
and sad, and could not rally into gaiety.” But the imaginative
force of passages like this—and they are not infrequent in this
section of the novel—gives Ruth an independence of character
that reveals the speciousness of her supposed immaturity and
which remains at the back of the reader’s mind throughout the
remainder of the novel.

The emotional and imaginative investment which Mrs.
Gaskell has in the North Wales chapters of *Ruth* has been very
properly attributed to her own experiences there, both on
honeymoon and, more sadly, on the holiday which was terminated
by the death of her son. It is interesting to note how, in terms
of the mechanics of the plot, the events in Wales take up far
more room than is strictly necessary: Mrs. Gaskell is lingering
over an area that she knows and loves. There is, though, more
to this than recollected affection on Mrs. Gaskell’s part. Ruth’s
stay in Wales gives her a brief interlude of apparent independence
before her life of retribution begins. “Apparent”, because in
terms of Mrs. Gaskell's conception of the novel, such independence can only be an illusion to be shattered when Bellingham, under the influence of his class-conscious mother, deserts Ruth. But however apparent or temporary the experience may be it takes on a reality that goes beyond the moralistic thesis of the novel, and it is the strength of this reality that raises very similar questions when Bellingham re-enters Ruth's life later in the novel. I refer, of course, to the passages at "Abermouth"—again the reversion to Wales¹—when Ruth, acting as governess to Bradshaw's children, is confronted by Bellingham in his role as Bradshaw's political protegée. Again Ruth is isolated, free for once of the beneficial influence of the Bensons, and again she reacts in a way that seems to be somewhat at odds with what Mrs. Gaskell would have us believe of her situation.

Bellingham's re-appearance comes at a point when five years have passed since Ruth's adoption by the Bensons. Motherhood, we are told, has made of Ruth a creature of instinctive dignity that expresses itself as much in her physical appearance as in her behaviour:

The increase of dignity in her face had been imparted to her form. I do not know if she had grown taller since the birth of her child, but she looked as if she had. And although she had lived in a very humble home, yet there was something about either it or her, or the people amongst whom she had been thrown during the last few years, which had so changed her that whereas, six or seven years ago, you would have perceived that she was not altogether a lady by birth and education, yet now she might have been placed among the highest in the land, and would have been taken by the most critical judge for their equal, although ignorant of their conventional etiquette—an ignorance which she would have acknowledged in a simple, childlike way, being unconscious of any false shame.

Her whole heart was in her boy... (chapter 19, p. 207).

The suggestion is one of equanimity, self-adjustment and moral integrity, and if the modern sensibility winces at "she might have been placed amongst the highest in the land" it misses Mrs. Gaskell's point if it forgets that in society's terms Ruth should be an outcast. There is, of course, a serious threat to Ruth's position, in that it depends upon the lie about her

¹ Sharps, op. cit. p. 157, identifies Abermouth with Silverdale, near Morecambe in Lancashire, where the Gaskells had spent seaside holidays themselves, but the name given to the resort in the novel seems clearly to indicate that Mrs. Gaskell has Wales in mind.
situation told by the Bensons when they first took her in, but Ruth's regeneration is made to seem at this point independent of such a threat. Mrs. Gaskell makes great play with the moral problems surrounding the lie on several occasions, but she herself takes no absolute stand on the issue, using it, one suspects, as much to facilitate her plot as a moral issue in its own right.\footnote{The question of the moral propriety involved in the telling of a lie, or rather the concealment of the truth, in the interests of the wider good is examined by Mrs. Gaskell in several of her novels, most notably in *North and South*, where the heroine, Margaret Hale, is placed in a situation where she knows that to reveal a particular truth will bring positive harm to her innocent brother, but that to conceal it is not only effectively to tell a lie, but to bring shameful imputations upon her own character. Sharps argues that "the conversation between Mr. Bradshaw and Mr. Benson when the secret is out demonstrates the usual Gaskell moral: that lying even with the intent that good may come, is scarcely defensible" (op. cit. p. 165), but this seems to me an over-simplification of Mrs. Gaskell's position, both in this specific instance and generally. When she came to write *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* Mrs. Gaskell was to have very effective practical experience of the problem which she liked to set her own heroines.}

The most important factor in Mrs. Gaskell's assessment of Ruth at this point is that Bellingham would appear to have been forgotten. He is scarcely in fact mentioned in the novel after Ruth's reflections about him at the time of Leonard's birth until he re-appears in the improbable guise of Bradshaw's election candidate. Prior to Bellingham's return there is just one reference to

... a strange yearning kind of love for the father of the child whom she pressed to her heart, which came, and she could not bid it begone as sinful, it was so pure and natural, even when thinking of it as in the sight of God ... (chapter 18, p. 190).

But at the time Mrs. Gaskell ignores the tension which such a feeling on Ruth's part implies. We are therefore insufficiently prepared for Ruth's reaction when she comes face to face with Bellingham at Abermouth:

The figures near her vanished into strange nothingness; the sounds of their voices were as distant sounds in a dream, while the echo of one voice thrilled through and through. She could have caught at his arm for support, in the awful dizziness which wrapped her up, body and soul. That voice! No! if name, and face, and figure were all changed, that voice was the same which had touched her girlish heart, which had spoken most tender words of love, which had won, and wrecked her, and which she had last heard in the low mutterings of fever (chapter 23, p. 266).
Alone in her room, Ruth torments herself with her dilemma:

Oh, my God! I do believe Leonard's father is a bad man, and yet, oh! pitiful God, I love him; I cannot forget—I cannot! (chapter 23, p. 271).

To some extent the force of feeling here is a consequence of the novelistic tendency towards melodrama—"That voice!"—but the reader cannot help feeling that the repression of her feelings for Bellingham, which is implicit in Ruth's response at this point, should surely have been acknowledged by Mrs. Gaskell not just at this stage but as a factor to be contended with in the process of re-adjustment with the Bensons. Here again the presentation of Bellingham is crucial: either he is a wooden figure, and an agent in the plot who can later be ignored, or he has qualities and characteristics which are attractive to a heroine even as convincingly virtuous as Ruth. This is not to say that a good woman cannot love a bad man, but that a fully realized character should not be made to respond to a cardboard cut-out, and that is the situation which Mrs. Gaskell contrives. Again we are forced to the conclusion that there is more to the Ruth-Bellingham situation than Mrs. Gaskell explicitly admits, and again with Mary Barton in mind it is interesting to note that the threat posed to Ruth by the re-introduction of Bellingham into the novel is overtaken by the course of events involving Ruth's exposure to the Bradshaws. As in Mary Barton, where the issues raised by the strike are overtaken by the detective-story of the Carson murder, a major issue is left unresolved by the introduction of, in a sense, "safer" material.

Ruth's reaction to Bellingham is not simply a matter of what we are told, somewhat melodramatically, by Mrs. Gaskell's commentary: the passages in which Ruth struggles with her feelings about him are as splendidly conceived, in imaginative terms, as anything in the novel. In the chapter entitled "The Meeting on the Sands" (chapter 24), in which Ruth keeps her assignation with Bellingham, there is again that superb manipulation of natural imagery to express Ruth's psychological state that was in evidence in the early chapters of the novel; take for instance the passage in which Ruth sees Bellingham waiting for her:

And now, close under the heathery fields, where they fell softly down and touched the sands, she saw a figure moving in the direction of the great shadow
made by the rocks—going towards the very point where the path from Eagle's Crag came down to the shore.

"It is he!" said she to herself. And she turned round and looked seaward. The tide had turned; the waves were slowly receding, as if loth to lose the hold they had, so lately, and with such swift bounds, gained on the yellow sands. The eternal moan they have made since the world began filled the ear, broken only by the skirl of the grey sea-birds as they alighted in groups on the edge of the waters, or as they rose up with their measured, balancing motion and the sunlight caught their white breasts. There was no sign of human life to be seen; no boat, or distant sail, or near shrimper. The black posts there were all that spoke of men's work or labour. Beyond a stretch of the waters, a few pale grey hills showed like films; their summits clear, though faint, their bases lost in a vapoury mist (chapter 24, pp. 292-3).

Here a recurrent image of Victorian literature, the inscrutable timelessness of the sea as an expression of the universality of human suffering, is transformed by Mrs. Gaskell's attention to detail into a specific substantiation of Ruth's isolation as she goes to meet her old lover. The connection between described landscape and psychological state is inescapable and it recurs, more explicitly, after the interview is over, when Mrs. Gaskell describes Ruth's exhaustion after her ordeal:

Her struggle, her constant flowing tears, which fell from very weakness, made her experience a sensation of intense bodily fatigue; and her soul had lost the power of throwing itself forward, or contemplating anything beyond the dreary present, when the expanse of grey, wild, bleak moors, stretching wide away below a sunless sky, seemed only an outward sign of the waste world within her heart... (chapter 24, pp. 301-2).

This is something very different from the fatigue to which Victorian heroines are notoriously prone; born of the experience embodied in the novel and given shape by its embodiment in an instinctively appropriate natural imagery, it convinces in a way which I would claim is rare in the whole range of Victorian fiction.

IV

In the figure of Ruth Hilton Mrs. Gaskell achieves her first full-scale character portrayal. In Mary Barton her stated priorities led her to conceive of her characters in terms of what they could be made to represent, and even when she transcends this rather elementary conception of character her loyalties are divided. Ruth, however, gives to its heroine a pre-eminence that is sustained throughout the novel. We should therefore be
careful in suggesting a simple disparity between intention and achievement where Ruth herself is concerned; rather is it a case of Mrs. Gaskell presenting a complex character within which her emphasis on the qualities of submission and self-sacrifice are more at odds than she seems to appreciate with the imaginative expression given to less predictable emotional responses. At one point Mrs. Gaskell refers with conviction to the goodness which comes from “the hidden life and experience of the heart” (chapter 19, p. 210). The hidden life and experience of her own heroine would seem on occasion to be more complicated than she herself is prepared to admit, and it is perhaps not too extreme a speculation to suggest that her anxieties about the novel as a whole were to some extent related to this factor.

Ruth, however, is not simply the story of its heroine’s regeneration. Much of its attractiveness comes from its evocation of the life-style of the Bensons, Ruth’s protectors, and from its tough-minded treatment of the deliberately contrasted Bradshaw family. Here Mrs. Gaskell shows us two forms of the Christian conscience: the pragmatically humane in the form of the Bensons’ selflessness, and the rigidly ideological in the form of the unshakable self-conviction of Bradshaw.

Benson’s protection of Ruth ultimately founders on the lie about her which he is forced to tell at the outset: as he himself says when Ruth has been exposed, “It has been my doing, my mistake, my sin” (chapter 27, p. 353). But to accept Benson’s words of regret at this point is to ignore the fact that the lie has obtained for Ruth the years during which she has been able to restore herself, as Benson’s more practically minded sister is quick to point out:

Ruth has had some years of peace, in which to grow stronger and wiser, so that she can bear her shame now in a way she never could have done at first (chapter 27, p. 358).

In the face of this pragmatic wisdom, and indeed in the light of the novel as a whole, Benson’s final rejoinder to the effect that “God’s omnipotence did not need our sin” rings rather false, for if all such situations could be left to God’s omnipotence there would have been little need for the novel at all. As I have suggested, I suspect that Mrs Gaskell is not so much concerned
with the morality, or otherwise, of the lie in which, after all, the most instinctively decent people are willing accomplices, but in the dramatization of practical Christianity as it contrasts with the conventional pieties of the Bradshaws’ formal creed. And, if one can adduce a very obvious piece of evidence, the almost unbroken similarity between the Bensons’ chapel at Eccleston and that which Mrs. Gaskell herself knew and loved at Knutsford, together with the association of the Benson household with domestic values that she so obviously admires, should be enough to convince us that there can hardly have been any other course of action than that which the Bensons follow from the start.

Against the Bensons are set the severely moralistic Bradshaw, with his submissive wife and, in various ways, rebellious children. Here surely is the pattern for the Gradgrinds in *Hard Times*, and what in particular distinguishes Mrs. Gaskell’s treatment of the situation, one feels, is that Bradshaw himself never becomes a figure of parody, while his effect upon his family, and in particular his daughter Jemima, is handled with considerable psychological insight. Here, for example, is Jemima’s response to her discovery of the truth about Ruth’s past:

Two hours ago—but a point of time on her mind’s dial—she had never imagined that she should ever come into contact with anyone who had committed open sin; she had never shaped her conviction into words and sentences, but still it was there, that all the respectable, all the family and religious circumstances of her life, would hedge her in and guard her from ever encountering the great shock of coming face to face with Vice. Without being pharisaical in her estimation of herself, she had all a pharisee’s dread of publicans and sinners, and all a child’s cowardliness—that cowardliness which prompts it to shut its eyes against the object of terror, rather than acknowledge its existence with brave faith. Her father’s often reiterated speeches had not been without their effect. He drew a clear line of partition, which separated mankind into two great groups, to one of which, by the grace of God, he and his belonged; while the other was composed of those whom it was his duty to try and reform, and bring the whole of his morality to bear upon, with lectures, admonitions and exhortations—a duty to be performed, because it was a duty—but with very little of that Hope and Faith which is the Spirit that maketh alive. Jemima had rebelled against those hard doctrines of her father, but their frequent repetition had had its effect, and led her to look upon those who had gone astray with shrinking, shuddering recoil, instead of with a pity so Christ-like as to have both wisdom and tenderness in it (chapter 25, p. 320).

That Mrs. Gaskell should concern herself with such precision of definition in the case of the attitudes of a character who, as far
as her plot is concerned, is a relatively minor figure, is a measure of the extent to which Ruth's story is not simply an end in itself, but an expression of a wider concern with the proper bases of social morality, expressed not only within the family but by the unease, for example, which Bradshaw feels over the more questionable aspects of his electioneering, in the wider public world. Mrs. Gaskell's insistence on the relationship between private and public morality is a constant undercurrent running throughout the novel, in fact, giving a fuller significance to such matters as the behaviour of Bellingham's mother, and the acceptance by Richard Bradshaw of conflicting standards within and without the home. It is thus perfectly appropriate that Ruth's ultimate salvation should be set against the nemesis of Bradshaw, and that this in itself should come about as a consequence of his son's exposure as a cheat in matters of business. As in Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell handles a range of inter-related themes: her belief in the need to maintain a properly integrated society, which expresses itself in her attitude towards industrial issues in Mary Barton and North and South, is as powerful, if less obviously explicit, in the predominantly pastoral atmosphere of Ruth. Ruth's own involvement with all the levels of society represented in the novel—with the socially superior Bellinghams, with the quietist Bensons, and with the new industrial aristocracy of the Bradshaws is in fact an expression in structural terms of this pre-occupation on Mrs. Gaskell's part, as indeed is Ruth's sentimentally conceived martyrdom in the service of a society whose natural instinct would be to reject her.

Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of her chosen social milieu in Ruth is restrained and affectionate, tactful and assured. It is, in itself, a more sober treatment of the world of Cranford and Wives and Daughters: Bradshaw and his business activities establish a link between the village community and the emerging commercial consciousness which is only hinted at in Cranford and which Wives and Daughters, by its deliberate reversion to the past, evades altogether. Paradoxically, however, it is those aspects of Ruth where Mrs. Gaskell perhaps seems less assured, or, if not less assured, less conscious of what she is doing, which represent the greatest potential for her development as a novelist. The
examination of the complexities of an individual character, and the demonstration of psychological stress by relating it to a symbolically expressive pattern of imagery, are the real advances in *Ruth*. Mrs. Gaskell's awareness of the intensity of loneliness, and its concomitant psychological problems, are areas which she later develops not only in her portrayal of her fictional heroines, but in her biography of Charlotte Brontë.

The authors with whom this paper deals are for the most part novelists and “creative” writers, but the American conservationist Frederick Law Olmsted followed a similar route in the visit he describes in Walks and Talks of an American Farmer in England (1852). His descriptions of rural Cheshire are of particular value to the social historian: there, as in Chester itself, he is as interested in the people as in the places, and he will recur in this paper later.

¹ In the early 1870s, for example, Charles Kingsley was Canon of Chester; his wife, writing to a friend, commented thus on the incursions of American tourists: “their first act, when disembarking at Liverpool, is to come over to Chester and see the oldest thing they can—i.e. a Cathedral—and then the Old Verger who unfortunately is a great Heró worshipper invariably tells them who the Canon in Residence is, and asks if they would not like to see him too! They are all paraded into the Chapter room too suddenly for Mr. Kingsley to make his exit” (Susan Chitty, The Beast and the Monk: a Life of Charles Kingsley (London, 1974), pp. 273–4).
"The passionate delights of Chester and the romance of red-sandstone architecture": the phrase sounds like Henry James, but it is in fact that usually much more sceptical traveller Henry Adams recalling his first impressions.\(^1\) James, of course, pays his tribute in the opening chapter of *The Ambassadors*:

The tortuous wall—girdle, long since snapped, of the little swollen city, half held in place by careful civic hands—wanders in narrow file between parapets smoothed by peaceful generations, pausing here and there for a dismantled gate or a bridged gap, with rises and drops, steps up and steps down, queer twists, queer contacts, peeps into homely streets and under the brows of gables, views of cathedral tower and waterside fields, of huddled English town and ordered English country. Too deep almost for words was the delight of these things.

Conveniently the passage epitomizes what the American expected of England: enduring evidence of "peaceful generations"; the sublimity of the cathedral tower contrasting with the homeliness of the streets; above all, the "huddled English town and ordered English country" so unlike America where the town was usually ordered, and ordered spaciously on a rectilinear pattern; and where the vaster rural scene had not been landscaped by man or disciplined by agrarian necessity. Chester and its surrounds conformed to American expectations, but little else in the North West did, and entry via Liverpool forced almost brutally upon the American consciousness the immediate realization that England was not all quaint gables, green fields, and dreaming spires.

It was not that Liverpool had the monopoly of mean streets and murk: London, for example, had more than its share, but London could distract attention from them to its showplaces in ways that Liverpool could not. The tourist's London was from choice the Tower, St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey and the parks; the tourist's Liverpool was of necessity the docks and their inescapable environs. Once past Liverpool the tourist could blissfully ignore the Industrial Revolution by concentrating on Stratford, Warwick, Canterbury, Bath, or the Lake District, but he could not ignore Liverpool at the outset.

With an irony that he did not wholly relish, one major American writer was given Liverpool as a reward for political services, though one of his biographers comes near to suggesting that he deserved it as an expiatory punishment. The importance of the port was such that its American consulate was regarded as one of the most prized of overseas appointments, and when in 1853 Franklin Pierce was elected President of the United States he gave it to the man who had written his campaign biography, the friend of his college days, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Forty-nine years old, something of a recluse by temperament and certainly unused to city life, Hawthorne was ill suited to a public post in a foreign land. Never affluent, he was disappointed to find the consulate less lucrative than he had been led to expect. There was a vacant consular agency in Manchester in his gift, and by not filling that he gained an extra £200 a year; he lived modestly in a rented house in Rock Park across the Mersey so as not to have to entertain, but his family still found it difficult to make ends meet. Within weeks of his arrival in England he was writing to a friend "It is worth while coming across the sea in order to feel one's heart warm towards his own country", and yet he had so obviously wanted to like England. His published account of his stay is entitled Our Old Home, but the text tends to belie the affectionate warmth of the title. "Liverpool, though not very delightful as a place of residence, is a most convenient and admirable point to get away from. London is only five hours off by the fast train". Prominent among the refuges he recommends is, of course, Chester, "the most curious town in England with its encompassing wall, its ancient Rows, and its venerable Cathedral"; yet later he was to remember vividly "the aged, musty smell with which old Chester first made me acquainted, and which goes far to cure an American of his excessive pre-dilection for antique residences". Readers of

1 Moncure Daniel Conway, The Life and Writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne (London and New York, c. 1890), pp. 146 ff.
2 Ibid. p. 151.
4 Our Old Home, p. 98.
The Marble Faun will remember that there he is even more censorious of the smells of Rome, and not merely for their mustiness. It was not only the North West at which Hawthorne turned up his nose.

In a private letter he is even more outspoken: "Liverpool is a most detestable place as a residence that ever my lot was cast in—smoky, noisy, dirty, pestilential; and the consulate is situated in the most detestable part of the city". Like Olmsted, Hawthorne was depressed by the climate:

It never does rain, and it never don't rain; but you are pretty sure to get a sprinkling if you go out without an umbrella... The Englishmen call it a sultry day whenever the thermometer rises above 60°. There has not been heat enough in England this season to ripen an apple.1

When, in Our Old Home, he can refer to "the never-failing green fields, hedges, and other monotonous features of an ordinary English landscape" one sees why he can so summarily dismiss Lancashire as "a dreary county" and one is almost surprised to find him excepting "its hilly portions" from this stricture.2

Yet all this must not be stated too one-sidedly. The accounts given by Hawthorne's son Julian suggest that his father, in his four years as consul, made a number of friends and found much to enjoy, even including a cricket match.3 Leslie Stephen thought that Hawthorne was afraid of coming to like England too well.4 Certainly there is something defensive in the aggressively American republicanism he exhibits, but there was one thing that he could never understand or condone. An entire chapter of Our Old Home is given over to what he revealingly calls "Outside Glimpses of English Poverty" and in the letter of 1853 already quoted he writes of Liverpool: "The streets swarm with beggars by day and by night. You never saw the like; and I pray that you may never see it in America". Such a prayer was possible at that time, but twenty-six years later, in

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1 Conway, op. cit. pp. 151, 152.
2 Our Old Home, p. 139.
4 Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library (1874–9); 1892 edition, 3 vols., i. 173.
1879, it was an American, Henry George, who came reluctantly to the conclusion that poverty was in some way endemic in an industrial society: "This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. It is the central fact from which spring industrial, social, and political difficulties that perplex the world." The anti-bellum American visitors who stood aghast at poverty in Liverpool were unknowingly looking into their own country's future, for the full impact of the Industrial Revolution was not felt in America until after the Civil War, and even then was unfamiliar to some writers. Hawthorne's New England small-town background of Salem and Concord had not prepared him for this: his bewildered reaction to it is predictable—indignant humanitarianism tinged with sentimentality. He can describe graphically the squalor he sees and the effect it has on him, but it remains an outside glimpse. One Easter he found himself in Manchester Cathedral—"a particularly black and grim old structure"—witnessing "one of the saddest sights I ever looked upon". This was the simultaneous wedding of several poor couples performed by the clergyman without fee. Hawthorne proceeds to draw the foreseeable contrast with the society wedding he saw later in the same cathedral, but his social criticism is blunted by the terms he uses. These people are, to him, "the mere rags and tatters of the human race" swept by chance together "into an unfragrant heap. Each and all of them, conscious of his or her individual misery, had blundered into the strange miscalculation of supposing that they could lessen the sum of it by multiplying it into the misery of another person". The detachment of the ironic style matches his inability to understand their evident happiness; their desire for a religious ceremony is to him less significant than the inappropriateness of their ragged clothes in such a context.

Six years before Hawthorne's arrival in England that formidable Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller on a similar tour had been similarly scandalized by "the streets of Glasgow and the gin-palaces of Manchester, and the dreariest recesses of London". Drawing lurid analogies with Dante's Inferno, she called for "the

1 Henry George, Progress and Poverty (1879), "Introductory: the Problem".
cure of ills that cry aloud" and hinted, as did Olmsted and Hawthorne, that that cure might well have to take the violent form of a revolution. Like Hawthorne again, she concluded that "The American in Europe, if a thinking mind, can only become more American". Margaret Fuller's disciple, William Henry Channing, held a pastorate in Liverpool when the Hawthornes were there, and the consul's family regularly attended his church perhaps to maintain their Americanness.

Wintering at Southport in 1856, Hawthorne was visited by his old friend Herman Melville. Discouraged by the poor reception of *Moby-Dick* and the general decline in his reputation, Melville had by then, Hawthorne recorded, "pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated" and the two men must have found little encouragement in each other's company. Melville, of course, had first landed at Liverpool almost twenty years earlier, in 1839, not as a man of letters but as a deck-hand on a packet-ship, and his impression of Liverpool was more down-to-earth and understanding than those quoted so far. He described the voyage in his novel *Redburn* (1849) and the chapters on Liverpool (27-42) strike the familiar keynote: "Poverty, poverty, poverty, in almost endless vistas; and want and woe staggered arm in arm along those miserable streets". To Melville, however, these are fellow human-beings, not Hawthorne's "unfragrant heap" and he does not produce the chauvinistic platitude that such poverty could not exist in America. As a native New Yorker he may have known that poverty in that city had been a serious social problem since the 1780s. Remarking the total absence of any black inhabitants of Liverpool, he recollected that "in the large towns of the 'free states' of America [negroes] almost always form a considerable portion of the destitute". He is distressed that these wretched Liverpudlians are all Englishmen, on their native soil, and he reflects that in America "such a being as a native beggar is almost unknown; and to be a born American citizen seems a guarantee against pauperism"; but this does not deny the existence of poverty among Americans who are not white or are not native-

born. He also notes with evident satisfaction the absence of hostility to black sailors ashore in Liverpool where "indeed the negro steps with a prouder pace, and lifts his head like a man". Melville's next comment has a candour and a perceptiveness too often lacking in these travellers' self-righteous accounts: "Three or four times, I encountered our black steward, dressed very handsomely, and walking arm in arm with a good-looking English woman. In New York, such a couple would have been mobbed in three minutes". Alone among these commentators Melville anticipates the effect of the colour question on Anglo-American relations in general as well as in the North West.

His comments are balanced in candour and humanitarian realism by those of Olmsted who sees the poverty as due in part to the repeal of the Navigation Laws: this meant that American ships could now take over work previously the monopoly of the English, and that American sailors were doing the labour in the docks previously done by the now unemployed locals. What distressed Olmsted was the passivity of the poor: "You can see nothing like such a dead mass of pure poverty in the worst quarter of our worst city. In New York, such a street would be ten times as filthy and stinking, and ten times as lively". Even the prostitutes on the dock seemed to Olmsted unnaturally pensive and more placid than their American counterparts.

One of the most discerning visitors was, perhaps surprisingly, Ralph Waldo Emerson. He had first come to Britain in 1833, even earlier than Melville/Redburn, and arriving from Boulogne had landed in London. He was motivated by "a wish to see the faces of three or four writers—Coleridge, Wordsworth, Landor, De Quincey and Carlyle".1 His account of his visit to Rydal Mount concentrates solely on Wordsworth's conversation, the tameness and conformity of which disappointed him. It is, however, a reminder that the literary pilgrimage to the Lake District was yet another reason why American writers penetrated into the Victorian North West. Hawthorne, for example,

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1 This, and all further Emerson quotations, except as otherwise indicated, will be found in English Traits (1856). Reference should also be made to The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson, vol. x, 1847–8, ed. Merton M. Seals, Jr. (Cambridge, Mass., 1973) and to Townsend Scudder, The Lonely Wayfaring Man. Emerson and Some Englishmen (London and New York, 1936).
visited Wordsworth's grave and sought out scenes associated with him and with Southey; he also had a rather one-sided conversation at Ambleside with Harriet Martineau's ear-trumpet. Emerson, preceding him, seems to have established communication more readily with her.

Emerson's second visit to England in 1847 extended his curiosity. As he put it, "The problem of the traveller landing at Liverpool is, Why England is England? What are the elements of that power which the English hold over other nations?" To answer those questions he published the book called *English Traits* which Carlyle praised highly. One bibliographer has identified six hundred books by Americans about England published before 1900: most of them are of the *Our Old Home* pattern of genteel description of places and atmosphere. *English Traits* is almost alone in its predominant concern with the English character, and although it is too idiosyncratically Emersonian to do for England what Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* did for the United States, it is still perceptive and provocative.

The North West suggested to Emerson one reason why England was England: he heard of Roberts's automatic spinning-mule, developed "to restore order among the industrious classes", he was told, "after a mob and riot at Stalybridge". With his characteristic fondness for symbols he fastened on this to represent "the power of machinery in Great Britain" which, he reported, "in mills, has been computed to be equal to 600,000,000 men". Machinery he described as "wise, versatile, all-giving"—"Whitworth divides a bar to a millionth of an inch"—but its implications for human beings worried him. "The incessant repetition of the same hand-work dwarfs the man"; "The robust, rural Saxon degenerates in the mills to...the imbecile Manchester spinner". Roberts's mule may have been "the delight of the mill-owners", but its effect on the quality of life was what dismayed Emerson.

*English Traits* appeared in 1856; in 1855 Melville had published his short story "The Tartarus of Maids" in which, in a New England setting, he had similarly recognized the deadening effect on the factory worker of repetitive production-line tasks.
In 1854 Dickens had made the same point in *Hard Times*. Emerson's spinning-mule symbol is less rich in overtones than Melville's disturbingly Freudian allegory, and Emerson lacks the fertility of Dickens's imagination and the persuasive Dickensian rhetoric, but *English Traits* is grounded in a more solid acquaintance with the social, economic and technological facts of the Industrial Revolution in the North West than Dickens acquired in his notoriously short visit to Preston. Taken as a whole Hawthorne's contribution to American literature is more substantial than Emerson's and wears better, yet he might have derived a deeper understanding of the North West from reading *English Traits* than from eavesdropping on weddings in Manchester Cathedral.

Hawthorne's most prolonged stay in Manchester was in 1857, the last year of his consulate, when he established his family for six weeks in "homely but not homelike lodgings in Chorlton Road" in order to study thoroughly the great Exhibition of Art Treasures of the United Kingdom which was being held here. Six weeks was not too long, for the catalogue identifies some 3,500 separate exhibits as well as galleries of works of ornamental art too numerous to list. The exhibition attracted, among other visitors, Tennyson and his friend Thomas Woolner the sculptor. Hawthorne saw them there and longed to make the Laureate's acquaintance but was too reticent to introduce himself. Having already planned the visit to Italy which was to produce *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne was conscious of his need for some training in art appreciation and here was an ideal opportunity. The exhibition had assembled the impressive total of 1,200 old masters, 160 pieces of sculpture, and a very representative range of more modern pictorial art, all from British collections. Gratifying as it would be to claim that Manchester completed Hawthorne's aesthetic education, the exhibition accomplished no transformation in him. Henry James's understatement remained true: "The plastic sense was not strong in Hawthorne." Other distinguished American visitors to the exhibition were Charles Eliot Norton and Harriet Beecher Stowe, both of whom stayed

1 Julian Hawthorne, op. cit. pp. 142 ff.
2 Henry James, *Hawthorne* (1879), chap. vi.
with Mrs. Gaskell at Plymouth Grove; Norton subsequently wrote on it in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

That an exhibition on such a scale should have been organized in the North West, however, indicated that art and industry were, even in 1857, by no means incompatible. It was a discovery that Margaret Fuller had, on her much earlier visit, formulated in incredulous and unflattering terms: "The manufacturing and commercial towns, burning focuses of grief and vice, are also the centres of intellectual life, as in forcing-beds, the rarest flowers and fruits are developed by use of impure and repulsive materials."

Emerson's second visit to the North West, that of 1847 which produced *English Traits*, could be adduced as further evidence of this. He came, he records, "in response to an invitation from some Mechanics' Institutes in Lancashire and Yorkshire . . . on liberal terms, to read a series of lectures in them all". So far this paper has concerned itself with the impressions the Victorian North West made on a number of writers who visited the region in various capacities, not primarily literary. The remainder of it will be concerned with the Victorian North West's informed and lively interest in American writing.

The invitations that Emerson had received to lecture in the North West were genuine enough, but behind them all lay the initiative of one Manchester resident, Alexander Ireland. Of him Emerson observed "he approved himself the king of all friends and helpful agents; the most active, unweariable, imperturbable".1 Born in Edinburgh in 1810, the son of a businessman, Ireland had met Emerson almost by chance when he visited the Scottish capital in 1833. The man to whom Emerson had an introduction was too busy to show him round the city and deputed the task to Ireland. The two men took to each other and, in response to Ireland's request, Emerson sent him a long letter describing his meetings with Carlyle and Wordsworth. Ten years later Ireland moved to Manchester as representative of a Huddersfield firm, but he had retained his interest in intellectual matters; not only was he one of the tiny group of people who knew the identity of the author of the

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controversial *Vestiges of Creation* but it was Ireland who received
the proofs of that book and forwarded them to Robert Chambers
so that the author should be unknown even to the printer.

Shortly after Ireland’s arrival in Manchester John Bright and
some friends founded a newspaper called the *Manchester Examin­
er*; according to a young member of its staff, Francis Espinasse,
it was intended to be “the organ of a Liberalism more advanced
than the *Guardian*”.¹ In 1846 a resignation enabled them to
make Ireland the publisher and business manager of the *Examiner*,
and at last he found scope for his literary interests as well as his
business abilities. The *Examiner* soon merged with the *Manch­
ester Times* and Ireland, as proprietor of this influential journal,
as well as in his own right, became prominent in the city’s
cultural life. He was, for example, a member of the committee
that created in 1851 the Manchester Free Library, but it was as
one of the directors of the Manchester Athenaeum that he was
able to organize Emerson’s visit.

Emerson had some reservations about it but he had little
choice, so importunate was Ireland, and so efficient. The only
flaw in the arrangements was the slight confusion over his arrival
in Liverpool. Espinasse was sent to meet him with an invitation
from Carlyle; he missed him, and Carlyle’s letter was delayed;
but the error was soon righted. Before Emerson landed the
*Examiner* had announced his impending arrival in an enthusiastic
unsigned piece by Espinasse, who nevertheless managed to strike
a cautionary note as well. He warned the audience

that in Emerson they will have before them a “lecturer” of a kind with which they
are by no means familiar—an original man... Save and excepting Carlyle,—far
as he, with his stern prophetic message, stands above his limited, as it were, if
more joyful American brother,—there is no other living thinker of whom this,
or anything like this, can be said.

This uneasiness at the degree of communication Emerson might
achieve with his audience was being privately voiced by Carlyle
in terms less flattering to both:

Emerson is now in England, in the North, lecturing to Mechanics’ Institutes &c.;
in fact, though he knows it not, to a kind of intellectual canaille.

His doctrines are too airy and thin for the solid practical heads of the Lancashire region.  

Emerson in fact gave simultaneously two separate courses of lectures in Manchester and a third in Liverpool. To the Athenaeum audience he gave, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, six lectures on "Representative Men": one on "The uses of Great Men", and one each on Swedenborg, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Goethe. That he did not give the one on Plato subsequently included in the published volume was no reflection on his audience: to the Mechanics' Institute he emphasized the importance of young men reading Plato almost as though he thought they needed the advice more than the gentry at the Athenaeum. His four lectures (on Mondays) to the Mechanics were, said Espinasse, on "homelier" topics: these were "Eloquence", "Domestic Life", "Reading", and "The Superlative in Manners and Literature". The press reported "a very numerous and attentive auditory".

The Guardian's very full coverage of every lecture widened the audience he reached but embarrassed him in another way: he complained in a letter:

The newspapers here report my lectures and London papers reprint so fully, that they are no longer repeatable, & I must dive deeper into the bag & bring up older ones, or write new ones, or cease to read.

Less reproduction of text and more comment on the reception of the lectures would have been helpful to the modern scholar, but the comments are usually formal and perfunctory. The lecture on Napoleon (which was repeated many times, and often by request) seems to have been especially popular. It met with "loud and continued applause" at the Athenaeum from "a crowded auditory despite the rain". On the night following its delivery the Athenaeum Essay and Discussion Society debated the question "Has the Warrior, the Statesman, or the Poet, been


2 Letters, iii. 452. The report on the first lectures in Howitt's Journal in December 1847 was in all probability written by Mrs. Gaskell; see Ross D. Waller, "Letters Addressed to Mrs. Gaskell by Celebrated Contemporaries (now in the possession of the John Rylands Library)", Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, xix (1935), 6-7.
of greater service to mankind?"; the meeting was obviously planned for discussion of the whole "Representative Men" series, of which only the "Goethe" remained to be given. In Preston the Napoleon lecture was heard by "a highly respectable audience... with profound attention throughout"; in Halifax it received "breathless attention".

The Swedenborg lecture was perhaps the least successful. The Guardian warned that "the abstruse nature of the subjects treated must be taken into account if we fail in giving a fair abstract of the lecture as a whole". Others to whom the subjects were less abstruse challenged the treatment of them. "I am preached against every Sunday by the Church of England, & by the Church of Swedenborg"; Emerson reported in a letter, and surviving press cuttings confirm this hostility. At the Annual General Meeting of the Athenaeum in January 1848 reference was again made to offence that had been given by some of Emerson's views, but the Guardian, reporting it, gave no details, and the meeting seems to have agreed on the success of the series as a whole.

As late as 1883, a reviewer in the Liverpool Weekly Albion (26 May) remembered the "freshness, originality, and simplicity" of Emerson's performance.

He was everywhere followed by a crowded and appreciative audience; and to have seen and heard Emerson lecture is now considered to have been one of the greatest literary as well as spiritual events in many a man's life.

Espinasse in the 1890s remembered the "perfect serenity" of his lecture room manner and his indifference to the effect he was having on his "numerous and attentive" audience. One member of the audience had been the local novelist and blue-stocking Miss Geraldine Jewsbury, the friend and correspondent of Jane Carlyle. "Miss Gooseberry", as Mrs. Carlyle sometimes referred to her, had initial misgivings about Emerson when she entertained him in her Greenhays home, but even she capitulated:

I have a great affection for Emerson, in spite of the provokingly serene ether he always seems to breathe. He has a fine spirit in him, and so much humanity too.²

¹ Ibid. p. 444.
² Quoted Scudder, op. cit. pp. 110-11.
The least sympathetic account of Emerson’s performance comes from an Englishman who nevertheless admired his work sufficiently to publish, in 1855, what has been called “the very first book on the Concord sage which appeared in print”. This was George Searle Phillips of Huddersfield who wrote under the pseudonym “January Searle.”

Few people there present knew what to make of these lectures; they were so ultra, and so utterly unlike anything that had previously been heard by them. The manner of the lecturer, too, was to all appearance most eccentric. He mounted the rostrum in a free and careless style; took his manuscript out of his pocket, and standing bolt upright, began to read in his calm, cool way, as if he were a great overgrown schoolboy, saying his task. There was no effort in his elocution; it was downright plain reading, and nothing more. Now and then his face lighted up, and his strange mystic eyes flashed as with the Delphic fire, but it was a momentary ebullition, and the statue was itself again.

Emerson told his first Athenaeum audience that he had originally intended to begin with an attempt to give expression to those thoughts which the voyage and arrival in England might naturally suggest; so that what he should say might be in a very modest manner a respectful expression of an American to England. This design on further reflection he had postponed, not abandoned.

The idea for *English Traits* was beginning to form, but he found an opportunity even earlier than that book for “a respectful expression of an American to England.” In mid-November the Athenaeum held its Annual Soirée in the Free-Trade Hall, and Emerson was one of the guests of honour. Dickens was also to have been present—he had scored a great success at the first of these soirées—but in the event was unable to come. Richard Cobden, however, who had been a founder of the Athenaeum, was one of the most popular of the speakers and Emerson followed him. He was sufficiently pleased with his speech to reprint a newspaper report of it at the end of *English Traits*. Press reports other than the one Emerson reproduced show that the original speech was in fact longer and contained some felicitous lighter touches. In either version it is a celebration of

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3 From an unidentified newspaper cutting in the Alexander Ireland Collection, Manchester Public Libraries.
"the moral peculiarity of the Saxon race—its commanding sense of right and wrong". It refers to "this time of gloom and commercial disaster, of affliction and beggary in these districts", but it ends with a reassertion of faith:

If the courage of England goes with the chances of a commercial crisis, I will go back to the capes of Massachusetts, and my own Indian stream, and say to my countrymen, the old race are all gone, and the elasticity and hope of mankind must henceforth remain on the Alleghany ranges or nowhere.

That this was not the empty rhetoric of public oratory is apparent from Emerson's private letters of the time. He was still distressed at the poverty he saw, but I respect the English always the more, the sensible handsome powerful race, they are a population of lords, & if one king should die, there are a thousand in the street quite fit to succeed him!

Commuting between Manchester and Liverpool was even reconciling him to industrial mechanization.

A wonderful place is England, the towns are growing, some of them almost at the rate of American towns, and, in Lancashire, will by & by meet, & make a city as big as and bigger than London, and London is filling up Middlesex. The mechanical might & organization it is oppressive to behold. I ride everywhere as on a cannon ball (though cushioned & comforted in every manner) high & low over rivers & towns through mountains in tunnels of 3 miles & more at twice the speed & with half the motion of our cars & read quietly the Times Newspaper which seems to have machinized the world, for my occasions.

Before leaving Manchester Emerson gave, at his lodgings in Fenny Street, Higher Broughton, a supper party for some of his closest English friends and—the word is inescapable—disciples. He used the occasion to read to them the paper on Plato omitted from the Athenaeum series. In addition to Ireland, Espinasse, and a number of other Mancunians, there were two men from Nottingham, two from Birmingham, and others from Liverpool, Sheffield and Newcastle. Phillips even walked from Huddersfield to be present and walked back the next day. This did not prevent his writing a very waspish account of the meeting, though the waspishness was directed rather at the other guests than at their host. These were the men on whom Emerson's influence was at that time strongest: Ireland, in an article of November 1847, introducing Emerson to readers of the

1 Letters, iii. 452. 2 Ibid. pp. 452–3.
Athenaeum Gazette, had spoken of him as known only to "quiet, earnest, silently-working men,—young men not unfrequently" who were to be found "here and there, in out-of-the-way and quite unexpected places".

There seems no doubt, however, that this circle was substantially widened as a result of the Athenaeum lectures and the press coverage of them. Frederick Law Olmsted, in a Chester book-seller's a few years later, found a display of Representative Men beside copies of Washington Irving's Sketchbook, "and the proprietor told us he had sold a great many of them". Emerson returned to Manchester more than once in 1872 and 1873 on private visits, usually staying with Ireland, who by then lived at Bowdon, and on at least one such occasion enjoyed a reunion with many of the friends of his 1847 visit. Meanwhile a new body, known as the Manchester Literary Club, had sprung up. In 1882 they founded a journal with national as well as local aspirations, called the Manchester Quarterly. The opening essay in the first number was an account by the Reverend Stuart J. Reid of "A Summer Day at Concord, Mass." spent with Emerson, and it is indicative of the continued interest in him that in 1884 the Manchester Quarterly published an essay on "Emerson as Poet" and in 1885 a longer piece on "Concord and its Worthies". This last deserves mention for its claim that Emerson's seminal essay Nature met with a better reception in Britain than in the U.S. and for its recognition that, despite Emerson's popularity, Thoreau "seems to have been almost unknown, or at any rate unread in England unless by a few".

Ireland's interest in Emerson's work grew steadily. He was involved, in the 1870s, in the attempt to publish in England a two-volume edition of Emerson's uncollected essays. This project has been the subject of a good deal of misunderstanding which I have tried to clear up in another context,¹ but although abortive it did ensure the preparation and publication of Emerson's last volume, Letters and Social Aims, which might not otherwise have appeared in the author's lifetime. After Emerson's death in 1882 Ireland expanded his obituary in the Examiner

into a small volume called *In Memoriam: Ralph Waldo Emerson*. This met with such popularity that he expanded it, in its turn, into a book of more than three hundred pages called *Ralph Waldo Emerson*; the sale of this within twelve weeks necessitated a second, revised and enlarged edition. Emerson died on 27 April: Ireland’s introduction to this second revised edition is dated 21 October of the same year. The book is still valuable for its personal recollections and the material it brings together, but perhaps Ireland’s most significant contribution to Transcendentalist studies was made in 1847 when he induced Emerson to annotate the Table of Contents in his copy of *The Dial* so as positively to identify the unnamed contributors.¹

Although he admired Emerson most, Ireland knew several other American authors too. Margaret Fuller he had met in Liverpool in 1846; Hawthorne he accompanied to the Exhibition of Art Treasures on the occasion when Tennyson was there; he also knew James Russell Lowell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and that interesting, though minor, writer Moncure Daniel Conway, another dedicated Emersonian. Very much of a bibliophile, Ireland had “one of the rarest and finest private libraries in the city” and himself published on Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, as well as on book-collecting. All who knew him comment on his extra-ordinary good-nature—“I think there is a pool of honey about his heart” was Emerson’s characteristic phrase—and his good humour, which Emerson found “absolutely comic”.² He is plainly a figure who deserves to be better remembered, and it is a pity that the collection of his papers deposited in the Manchester Central Library tells us far more about his literary interests than about the man himself.

Of books, Emerson had said, in “The American Scholar”, “They are for nothing but to inspire”. It was essentially in this spirit that his devotees in the North West read, listened to, and discussed his work. Most of them were also admirers of Thomas Carlyle (Ireland, Espinasse and others knew him personally). They asked of literature that it should be inspirational and the

² *Letters*, iii. 452.
nearest they came to literary criticism was in Ireland's insistence that Emerson was not an "elegant essayist":

[His words] gush fresh from the fountains of thought; they are abrupt, swift, and sudden—always bracing, clear, gladsome. They are instinct with vitality, and carry a force with them which inflicts, as it were, sharp blows.¹

It is a good definition of Emerson's prose style.

Another American writer around whom a similar cult was to develop in this region was, of course, Walt Whitman. In 1885 a little group of young men began to meet every week for informal discussion of topics of current interest in the house of an architect, J. W. Wallace, in Eagle Street, Bolton. Whitman quickly became the focus of their idealism, and in 1887 Wallace and his doctor friend John Johnston sent Whitman on his birthday a joint letter and a gift of £10. "One of us", that letter explained, "a doctor, owes to you entirely his spiritual enfranchisement and deliverance from soul-numbing scepticism";² the other (Wallace, who drafted the letter) had studied Carlyle, Ruskin and Emerson with less profit than he now derived from Leaves of Grass. Delighted with so eloquent a tribute, Whitman replied, and a correspondence began which continued until his death in 1892—the last letter Whitman ever wrote himself was to this group. In his closing years and after his death the correspondence was sustained also by his disciple Horace Traubel and by his Canadian devotee, R. M. Bucke, who visited Bolton and addressed the fellowship in 1891. Both Johnston and Wallace made voyages to the States in order to visit Whitman in person.

Another member of the Eagle Street College, as they jocularly called themselves, was Charles Sixsmith of Anderton who summed up their feelings as follows:

We regarded him not only as the great poet of democracy, who had written the tenderest and most profound poems of love and comradeship, but also as a religious poet whose gospel was to us a philosophy of life. We certainly made great claims for Whitman's genius, claims which were considered exaggerated, but time has verified our judgment.

¹ Athenaeum Gazette (Manchester), 1 November 1847, p. 7.
² This quotation and those that follow are taken from manuscripts in the John Rylands University Library. Reference should also be made to Harold Blodgett, Walt Whitman in England (Ithaca, N.Y., 1934), although this book is not accurate in all its details.
Again, their concern was with a writer seen as a prophetic rather than as a literary genius. James Wallace told Whitman that he hoped to write “an account of your work that should include one or two things that have not yet been said—at any rate with sufficient clearness and emphasis”, and in one letter he mentioned that, in reading Fors Clavigera he detected that “in minor points” Ruskin was “in unison with” Whitman. In their published Visits to Walt Whitman (1917), however, Johnston and Wallace are more concerned, in Wallace’s words, with “every scrap of Whitman’s conversation which I was able to note down” than with any critical appreciation of his work. It is a diffuse, anecdotal, enthusiastic book, not a reasoned appraisal. The speeches made in August 1891 at the meeting held to mark Bucke’s return to and Wallace’s departure for the United States, dwell, with appropriate Whitman quotations, on brotherhood, comradeship and the meaning of life. They were joined on this occasion by Edward Carpenter, whose Whitmanesque Towards Democracy had appeared in 1883, but he too spoke of Whitman as a Socialist rather than as a poet.

The Eagle Street College probably did less for Whitman in this country than Ireland and his friends had done for Emerson. They were, of course, in touch with Whitman mainly by post and only in his declining years, whereas Ireland’s friendship with Emerson extended over half a century. They did not have the access to the press and to a popular audience that Ireland’s position gave him, and even if they had, they were not expert enough to know how to exploit it. Their correspondence with Whitman concentrated on his health, the weather, their daily lives. Nevertheless, this was what Whitman enjoyed more than literary talk: he told Johnston that he “liked to be a sensible man sometimes!”, and his affection for “those good Lancashire chaps”, as he called them, must have been strengthened by the sense they gave him of having, almost for the first time, reached a real audience. Their correspondence was accompanied by an exchange of gifts: money, clothing and a quilt went to the ageing poet, but also a continuous flow of periodicals containing items that they thought might interest him. In return he sent them autographed books, press cuttings, magazines. They built
up a very sizeable collection of Whitmania and when, in 1926, a Preston bookseller offered Wallace's collection for sale at £350, most of it was bought for America. The bulk of the correspondence had already, at Wallace's wish, gone to the Library of Congress. However, enough material remained for Bolton Public Library to form an impressive collection from it. Wallace had accumulated 89 books; Sixsmith, though he thought Wallace's collection better, had 125; and those, together with a quantity of manuscript material, press cuttings, and similar useful ephemera have become the property of the John Rylands University Library. The Bolton fellowship became an informal focus for Whitman studies, maintaining contact with not only Edward Carpenter in Sheffield but John Addington Symonds on the continent and many other lesser figures as well. They and their successors continued to celebrate Whitman's birthday up to at least 1938, and for a while too they marked the anniversary of Lincoln's assassination with readings of Whitman's lecture on Lincoln and his "Burial Hymn".

It would be unwise to invest this with any deep political significance: they knew little about Lincoln, but as hero-worshippers they were commemorating their hero's hero. The statue of Lincoln which still stands in Platt Fields where it was "temporarily" erected in 1919 was a gift to the city from the Sulgrave Institution in recognition of the Manchester cotton-spinners' support for the North in the Civil War. The nature and extent of that support is currently being called into question by historians in a debate to which this paper can contribute little. Emerson, Whitman, Transcendentalism—these were not household names among the Lancashire cotton-operatives of the 1860s. The Emersonians were predominantly middle class and professional men, as indeed, twenty years after the Civil War, were the Bolton Whitman enthusiasts; Wallace refers only to "one or two artisans" among them. Yet Ireland and his friends were intellectual leaders of the community; the Examiner and Times was the most consistently pro-Union paper in the region, and in this indirect way the democratic and liberal ideals they

learned from Emerson were propagated, just as Carpenter, Wallace and Johnston popularized Whitman's ideas if not necessarily his works.

It should not, however, be inferred that the Victorian North West confined its interests exclusively to American literature of a non-fictional and improving nature, but it does seem to have shown a preference for it. Mark Twain, for example, lectured three times in Liverpool, but the press was, in some of its comments, lukewarm or hostile. He did not, as far as I know, lecture in Manchester. We need not, perhaps, take wholly seriously Mark Twain's account of his first railway journey from Liverpool to London when he was delighted to find the man facing him reading The Innocents Abroad but mortified when, by the end of the journey, the man had not raised even as much as a smile at it. I do, however, have a copy of that book that seems to have been owned by a Manchester merchant whose pencilled marginalia are fascinating in their solemnity. Mark Twain's comparison between the Sea of Galilee and Lake Tahoe, for example, is glossed "Mark, the same Master created Lake Tahoe but He honoured the Sea of Galilee with His presence".

In 1882 a Manchester reformer, A. Arthur Reade, was compiling a volume called Study and Stimulants, containing the views of the famous on the effect of alcohol and tobacco on the workings of the mind. The Americans from whom he sought contributions were H. H. Bancroft, William Cullen Bryant, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Dean Howells, Moncure Conway, and T. W. Higginson as well as Mark Twain. The panegyric on tobacco that he received from Clemens evidently nonplussed him but he published it with the caution "I hope that young smokers will not conclude that by following the example of Mark Twain, their brain will become as fertile as his". On the other hand, a similarly random piece of evidence that Mark Twain's fertility was appreciated locally may be found in the delightful letter he received in 1887 from a resident in Circular Road, Withington:

Dear Mr. Mark Twain,

My brother Jack and I have read the Adventures of Tom Sawyer, the

1 Owned by the Mark Twain Papers, the Library of the University of California at Berkeley.
Adventures of Huck Finn, Life on the Mississippi, and the Prince and the Pauper, and think them splendid, especially the Prince and the Pauper, I think. We have been thinking it would be a delicious History of England, if you wrote it, and made a few variations, of course, like you did in the Prince and the Pauper. It would not matter about you making it true if you made it interesting. We should like you to write it so much, please do.

I am your loving reader,

Kate L. Corbett (aet. 9)

Had the letter been written a year earlier we could have claimed that *A Connecticut Yankee* was Manchester-inspired, but we know that he had already begun on the manuscript of that book before this suggestion reached him. Whether he ever told his precocious little correspondent just what "delicious" and "interesting" variations to English history he was contemplating at that time remains unknown, and we have no information either on what Miss Corbett thought of that book if she read it.

This topic is by no means exhausted. There are other authors to whom we could refer, such as Charles Eliot Norton and his friendship with Mrs. Gaskell. We might turn to the essays in the *Manchester Quarterly* on topics other than Emerson. We might trace the contribution to the popular enjoyment of American fiction made by the Tillotson Fiction Bureau which, operating from Bolton, syndicated fiction by English and American authors for publication in provincial newspapers throughout the country. We might speculate on why so recondite a periodical as *Cope's Tobacco Plant*, published in Liverpool, should have printed so many essays on American literary topics, including James Thomson's very significant piece on Whitman.

There is time only to mention that at least one American writer became reconciled to the North West. In 1909 William Dean Howells began a book on *Seven English Cities* with a chapter called "A Modest Liking for Liverpool" and another on "Some Merits of Manchester". Howells thought Manchester "a most dignified town" where "the average faces were intelligent and the figures good". He visited the Rylands Library and had he been in less of a hurry might have provided this paper with a graceful conclusion. As it is, his "sole note upon the Rylands Library is the very honest one that it smelt,
like the Cathedral, of coal gas". He fled, therefore, to "the beautiful old Chetham College" where the absence of coal gas enabled him to return in imagination to "those dear Middle Ages which are nowhere quite wanting in England, and against which I rubbed off all smirch of the modernity I had come to Manchester for". With such prejudices it is perhaps surprising that the American writer and the Victorian North West tolerated each other as equably as they did.

1 The Library has, in fact, always been lit by electricity: one can only assume that it was the then coke-fired central heating that Howells smelt.
SIR JOHN BOWRING AND THE QUESTION OF TREATY REVISION IN CHINA

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Sir John Bowring was one of the most active "peace radicals" of the Victorian age. His name was always mentioned with those of Richard Cobden and other prominent members of the Peace Society. He had a varied and interesting career, including eleven years (1849-59) of service in the Far East which he began at the age of fifty-seven. His life should have offered fertile ground for study by historians interested in the Victorians, their ideals, and the possible compromises they made when sent to the front line in the opening of the East to British trade. It is unfortunate, therefore, that misinformation about such a man exists in so many references, including the Dictionary of National Biography. G. F. Bartle has produced a well-researched and cogent thesis on Bowring's career up to 1849. Much work remains to be done on his activities in the Far East, however. Such work had not been possible until the John Rylands University Library of Manchester purchased surviving papers of Sir John in 1958 and made them available for the inspection of scholars. Since then, various fascinating aspects of Bowring's diplomatic activities have come to light, in the form of specialist articles in this Bulletin. They began with Bartle's "Sir John Bowring and the Arrow War in China", "Sir John

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1 This article has been written in the congenial environment of St. Andrew's College in the University of Sydney. I am grateful to the Principal, Fellows and students of the College for having been most kind and helpful to a newcomer.


3 Classified as Rylands English MSS. 1228-34. Other sources which are equally important and which have not been available until recently are the Canton Archive in the Public Record Office, London; the Parkes Papers at Cambridge; the Clarendon Deposits at Oxford; the Broadlands MSS. at the Royal Historical Commission, and the Veritable Records of the Ch'ing Dynasty, Ch'ing-shih-lu (hence CSL), of the Hsien-feng period (hence HF) now in most major libraries of the world.
Bowring and the Chinese and Siamese Commercial Treaties’,”¹ and my “Sir John Bowring and the Canton City Question”.² The present article deals with yet another aspect of Bowring’s career in the Far East, namely, his efforts to “revise” the Treaty of Nanking, signed between Great Britain and China in 1842.

The question which immediately springs to mind is, why did Bowring want to revise the treaty? The idea was, of course, not entirely his. In fact, he had been instructed by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Clarendon, to try to change the treaty when he first assumed duty as H.M. Plenipotentiary in 1854.³ Therefore, the question should have been directed to the British government. To answer this question, it will be useful to clarify what exactly Britain expected to obtain from China, and why she was not happy with the Treaty of Nanking.

Britain has always wanted to trade freely with China since Britons appeared in Chinese waters in the seventeenth century. They brought back to Britain tea, which quickly became very popular and which was imported in increasing quantities as the years went by. Soon, they discovered that they were buying a great deal and not selling much in China. The main item of British export was woollens, which did not appeal to the Chinese at all. The Chinese preferred their light silk and cotton to heavy wool. Furthermore, China was commercially self-sufficient, and there was little that Britain could offer. However, Britain did not realize this. Moreover, in 1757 China closed all her ports except Canton to international trade. The background to this action will be discussed later. It suffices here to say that such a measure led the British to believe that their goods were not selling because of this restriction. If only this restriction were removed, they argued, all would be well. Hence


³ F.O. 17.210, Clarendon-Bowring, 13 February 1854.
Lord Macartney was sent to China in 1793, Lord Amherst in 1816, and Lord Napier in 1834 to try to persuade Peking to open more ports for trade.\(^1\) The failure of these missions convinced the British that coercion might succeed where persuasion had failed. Meanwhile, they discovered at least one commodity which sold well in China. This was opium, which quickly changed the balance of trade. For the first time, China found herself "in the red", and her silver bullion rushing out of the country. The subsequent economic crisis, and the devastating effects of opium, induced the Chinese government to take drastic measures to suppress opium.\(^2\) This gave Britain the excuse to use force, which she had been contemplating. Furthermore, opium was the product of India, not of England. Although its sale greatly helped to finance the administration of that colony, China had still not become a significant market for British goods. War broke out in 1839.\(^3\)

China succumbed to what was known as gunboat diplomacy. A treaty was signed at Nanking. Consequently, four more ports were opened to international trade. They consisted of the so-called five treaty-ports: Shanghai, Ningpo, Foochow, Amoy and Canton. The question of opium remained unresolved, however. Britain had wanted the drug to be legalized, and hence protected from possible Chinese moves to suppress it in the future. China realized that Britons had a vested interest in opium, and that she could not do much about it. On the other hand, she apparently found it difficult, if not impossible, to


\(^3\) Morse, Greenbery, Costin, Crammer-Byng and others have laid great emphasis on the corruption of the Chinese officials, irritating restrictions, injustices of jurisdiction, the insolent mandarins, and, in particular, their view that China was the centre of the world, and the like. Morse, for example, devoted a large number of pages to giving details of so-called insults in China. Although there is some truth in these accusations, too much emphasis on these matters has tended to obscure the main issue, which is that Britain wanted to open China and exploit the market. See the conclusion of this article.
bring herself to legalize the drug after all the anti-opium campaigns, the efforts to suppress it and, finally, war. She refused to comply, despite her defeat; and opium continued to be left in the hands of smugglers. Although Britain had agreed to let sleeping dogs lie for the time being, she was not at all happy about the vulnerability of the opium trade. Apart from anything else, "three or four million of Indian revenue" was at stake. Bowring, for example, was at one stage (1849) terrified lest the Imperial Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Hsü, might take steps to suppress opium. He depicted Hsü as reckless and resolute. He was convinced that if Hsü had his way, disasters were bound to follow. Although nothing happened eventually, a shadow was cast on the mind of Bowring, and indeed on that of the British government.

Britain soon found the Treaty of Nanking unsatisfactory for yet another reason. When the five treaty-ports were opened, the British merchants had high expectations. They expected the sale of manufactured goods to increase dramatically, if not five-fold. They flooded the market with items irrelevant to Chinese needs. The volume of business was not unsatisfactory for about two years after peace was restored; but after that, there was a steady decline, ending in a great slump in 1848. It was probably realized then that China was self-sufficient. Hence some concluded that there was little prospect of trade figures multiplying dramatically. Others disagreed. Consul Alcock, for example, argued that China might be self-sufficient; but British goods could still invade the vast inland trade, particularly in the rich Yangtze River valley and along the Grand Canal. Apparently, he was convinced that Chinese products made on the basis of a family economy or small handicraft industry could be no competition to the mass production of Great Britain. The Foreign Secretary at this time was Lord Palmerston and the

1 MSS. Clar. Dep. C37 China, Bowring-Clarendon, 4 October 1855. Bowring had opposed the opium trade when he was in Britain. When he went to the Far East, he completely changed his views. This is what is meant by "the possible compromises" mentioned at the beginning of this article.
2 Broadlands MSS. GC/BO/84, Bowring-Palmerston, 12 May 1849.
3 Canton Archive 137.1.42, report on the decline of trade at Canton (1848).
Plenipotentiary Sir George Bonham. Both were duly impressed. Palmerston instructed Bonham to approach Peking to make alterations in the treaty.¹ The Chinese, however, regarded a treaty as a permanent settlement, and would not allow it to be tampered with. Persuasion having failed, Palmerston again thought of war.

I clearly see that the Time is fast coming when we should be obliged to strike another Blow in China,... These half civilized governments, such those of China Portugal Spain America require a Dressing every eight or ten years to keep them in order. Their Minds are too shallow to receive an Impression that will last longer than some such period, and warning is of little use. They care little for words and they must not only see the Stick but actually feel it on their Shoulders before they yield to that only argument which to them brings conviction, the Argumentum Baculinum.²

Palmerston no doubt wished to wield the stick. But it was perhaps difficult to wield sticks over Europe, Asia and America at the same time. Consequently, his threats had to remain on paper, at least for the time being.

Since direct requests made to the Chinese had been turned down, and since a war with China was difficult to arrange at this stage, Britain tried to find some legal excuse to make the Chinese grant her further concessions. This she found in the question of the so-called treaty revision. Before proceeding further, it will be useful to clarify a few points about this question of treaty revision.

To begin with, the Treaty of Nanking did not provide for revision of any of its clauses at any time. In the subsequent Treaty of Wang-hsia, signed between China and America in 1844, there was a clause to this effect.³ It stipulated that, should there be unforeseen difficulties in the execution of the treaty, some minor changes to its clauses might be considered in twelve years time. As a result, Britain claimed the right to revise the

¹ F.O. 17.164, Palmerston-Bowring, 3 September 1850. J. K. Fairbank has quoted this at length in Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 379-80.
² F.O. 17.173, Palmerston’s remarks on Bonham’s despatches, 29 September 1850. Both Costin and Fairbank have used it (pp. 149-50 and 380, respectively).
³ Cf. Treaty of Wang-hsia, article 34. The same clause may be found in the Treaty of Whampoa, art. 35, signed with France in the same year.
Treaty of Nanking under the most-favoured-nation principle.\textsuperscript{1} If China and America had subsequently agreed to make some such modifications as regards the details of their treaty, Britain, under the most-favoured-nation principle, could of course share the privileges arising out of these modifications. Whether or not she could claim the right to revise her own treaty under the same principle, however, was a question for the law officers. The law officers, when eventually consulted by Lord Clarendon in 1857, denied that Britain could claim such a right.\textsuperscript{2} It no longer mattered in 1857. Britain had by then decided to use force again to back her demands, and had mobilized her troops and formed an alliance with France against China. There was no need for Elgin even to mention the phrase "treaty revision", and he did not. But there was a need in the early 1850s, after persuasion had failed and before the troops were ready.

Another point which needed to be clarified is how far one might go under the guise of treaty revision. Revision in this case ought to mean making some changes of detail within the framework of the existing treaty. It should not include demands which were extra and unrelated to the treaty. Opening the whole of the interior of China, in addition to the five treaty-ports, to foreign trade and legalizing the opium trade, were such demands. It is possible that the Chinese authorities were aware of the fact that Britain might exploit the clause providing for revision. Therefore they had worded it very carefully, and in such a way that it was guarded against this possibility.

Once the treaty is agreed upon, both parties [China and America] should abide by it, \textit{and must on no account make any changes to it} [italics inserted]. Since the [five] treaty-ports differ from one another, however, it is possible that some adjustments in the clauses governing trade and navigation [in these places] may be necessary, in which case both parties should meet again for negotiations in twelve years time.\textsuperscript{3}

\textsuperscript{1} Treaty of the Bogue, art. 8, signed with Britain in 1843.
\textsuperscript{2} F.O. 17.274, Clarendon-Elgin, 20 April 1857. This document makes nonsense of Morse's statement (p. 414). Costin's comments, on the other hand, are more careful and sober (pp. 184-5).
\textsuperscript{3} Treaty of Wang-hsia, art. 34, in Yü Nung-mo, \textit{comp. Chung-wei t'iao-yüeh lieh-pien} (Shanghai, 1933), p. 75. The American version of the relevant clause is: "Experience may show that inconsiderable modifications are requisite in those parts which relate to commerce and navigation."
It is obvious that the first is the main sentence, and the second only subsidiary. Furthermore, the third sentence runs as follows:

Britain and other countries must not take advantage of this clause to make unreasonable demands at will.

Hence, it is clear that any Briton appointed to negotiate for treaty revision with China had a difficult task on his hands. Bowring certainly had no illusions when he became H.M. Plenipotentiary in 1854, while his letter of appointment reminded him that it was nearly twelve years since the signing of the Treaty of Nanking. The letter also instructed him to take advantage of the occasion to make a series of new demands in addition to those mentioned. Firstly, he should obtain access generally to the whole interior of China as well as to other cities on the coast. Failing this, he was to obtain free navigation of the Yangtze River and access to all the cities of the rich Yangtze River Delta. He was also instructed to effect not only the legalization of the opium trade, but the abolition of transit duties (likin) on imports and exports, and the suppression of Chinese pirates. Furthermore, he was to regulate, if possible, the emigration of Chinese labourers (coolies), to secure the permanent residence at Peking of a British representative, and unrestricted personal intercourse between this representative and the Chinese authorities. Finally, he was

To provide that, in the construction of the *Treaty to be concluded* [italics inserted], all doubts are to be solved by reference to the English version and that alone. ¹

The last instruction is illuminating; the words in italics sum up the despatch exceedingly well. Bowring was instructed to conclude a *new treaty* with China. This explains why British documents constantly referred to a "new treaty" and not a "revised treaty".

Bowring's immediate task was somehow to establish the validity of his claim to a complete overhaul of the treaty. Clarendon, in giving him the above instructions, had alleged that Commissioner Ch'i-ying had recognized the right of the British to do so. However, when Bowring had the opportunity

¹ F.O. 17.210, Clarendon-Bowring, 13 February 1854.
to examine the correspondence between his predecessor, Sir John Davis, and Commissioner Ch’i-ying, he found that this was not the case.\(^1\) Apparently, the Chinese Secretary, Gutzlaff, had misinterpreted the Commissioner’s reply to Davis’s inquiries, and had therefore misinformed the Foreign Office. Ch’i-ying did not have any law officers to consult and had been led by Davis into thinking that Britain could claim the privilege of treaty revision under the most-favoured-nation clause. But he vehemently denied that the words “inconsiderable modifications”, which appeared in the American treaty, could possibly be taken to mean that “after twelve years, the Treaty should be disregarded and ministers appointed to determine upon other provision”.\(^2\) Indeed, it could only mean that “the minutiae of the commercial points may possibly after a term of twelve years stand in need of slight alteration”.\(^3\) Therefore, it was out of the question that Britain should claim the right to a new treaty. Davis did not pursue the subject with Ch’i-ying any further, apparently satisfied with the erroneous interpretation by Gutzlaff. Naturally, Bowring exclaimed that the Chinese authorities were bound to take note “of Sir John Davis’s silence, and will refer to it as evidence of his having recognized Keying’s views”.\(^4\) He concluded that his task would be “infinitely difficult”.

Equally difficult was the fact that he was forbidden to adopt an authoritative tone in advancing points or urging concessions. The treatment of these questions however requires much caution; for if we should press them in menacing language, and yet fail in carrying them, our national honour would require us to have recourse to force.\(^5\)

Clarendon found it necessary to restrain Bowring because he realized that he would not be able to implement Bowring’s threats should they be made. The situation in the Crimea was deteriorating rapidly, and war actually broke out when Bowring was on his way to take up his new appointment as H.M.

\(^1\) MSS. Clar. Dep. C19 China, Bowring-Clarendon, 27 April 1854.
\(^2\) F.O. 17.213, Bowring-Clarendon, 25 April 1854.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) MSS. Clar. Dep. C19 China, Bowring-Clarendon, 27 April 1854. Before romanization was standardized, Ch’i-ying was spelt Keying.
\(^5\) F.O. 17.210, Clarendon-Bowring, 13 February 1854.
Plenipotentiary. Furthermore, Bowring himself needed such restraint because he had shown himself to be over-enthusiastic about opening the whole of China to British trade. When Sir George Bonham recommended Bowring to succeed him as H.M. Plenipotentiary, he had to assure Lord Clarendon that Bowring "could, under proper instructions and restraints, manage affairs as they now are". When Bowring’s appointment was being considered in the Foreign Office, Addington wrote to Clarendon about him as follows:

Of his talent and intellectual vivacity there can be no doubt. But there might possibly be a question as to his carrying sufficient ballast to counteract his superfluity of sail. He would probably be over the Great Wall before we had time to look around us.

Should Bowring mishandle the situation, not only would it be impossible to obtain new concessions, but existing privileges might be jeopardized. Therefore, Clarendon warned him that, "in order to obtain results the practical advantage of which is not demonstrable, we might place in peril the vast commercial interests which have already grown up in China, and which with good and temperate management will daily acquire greater extension".

With many difficulties in front of him, and strings behind, Bowring set about negotiating for a revision of the treaty. On his arrival at Hong Kong, he took the first opportunity to write to Commissioner Yeh. But he expected "only an evasive answer on the subject". There was no reply for a week, and he began to wonder "if indeed we can get the Chinese to entertain that question at all". Like Ch'i-ying, Commissioner Yeh had no law officers to refer to as regards the British claim. He was either trusting enough to take Bowring’s word for granted, or, when he looked up the correspondence of his

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1 Bowring first went to China as Consul of Canton in 1849. He returned to England on leave in 1853, at the end of which he was appointed H.M. Plenipotentiary.
3 Ibid. Addington-Clarendon, 26 August 1854.
4 P.O. 17.210, Clarendon-Bowring, 13 February 1854.
6 Ibid. 27 April 1854.
predecessor, he realized that Ch'i-ying had accepted the claim in the way that he had understood it. In any case, since he obviously never dreamt that the clause providing for treaty revision could possibly be taken to mean negotiations for a new treaty, and since Bowring merely mentioned that the date for hsiu-yüeh (treaty revision) was drawing near, he replied that he would be happy to discuss the issue when the time came, i.e. in four months. It is interesting to see what wishful thinking Bowring indulged in as a result of this reply: “Still, the matter stands somewhat better than I expected it would, for the Imperial Commissioner had not referred to, and probably has not looked back to, Keying’s correspondence with Davis. His answer to me that we must wait till the time comes will give me good ground for a move when the time comes...”. However, probably realizing the weakness of his position, he immediately added, “... but we must anticipate every sort of repugnance and unwillingness”. He pointed out the wrong assumption that Ch'i-ying had agreed to interpret the provision for treaty revision in the way that the British had chosen to. “I think you will have to look at matters from a point of view somewhat different from that which you naturally stood on when I left England”, he told Lord Clarendon. “To found demands for the revision of the treaties on the concessions of Keying is a bad ‘locus proceduri’.” In his reply the Foreign Secretary agreed that there was nothing to be gained by mentioning Ch'i-ying and his correspondence with Davis, and Bowring was back in square one.

Since he had to wait four months before he could formally approach the Imperial Commissioner for discussions, Bowring went to Shanghai, partly to explore other possibilities. There he found a very cordial colleague in his American counterpart, McLane. He also discovered much confusion in the place. One of the rebel groups, the hsiao-tao-hui, had occupied the city, and Europeans had to organize a militia to protect their settlement outside the city. The customs house had ceased to function, and trade was in peril. He and McLane worked hard to restore trade to a more secure footing, and, with the co-operation of the

1 Ibid. 31 May 1854. 2 Ibid. 3 F.O. 17.211, Clarendon-Bowring, 5 July 1854.
Chinese authorities, a foreign Inspectorate of Customs was established, and revenue began to flow into the Manchu coffers again. As an advocate of honest free trade, Bowring's hostility towards smuggling and the evasion of legal taxes is understandable. He had also envisaged using the new system to strengthen his position, when he raised the subject of treaty revision with the Chinese authorities responsible for Shanghai, namely, Governor Chi-erh-hang-a and Governor-General I-liang.

The back duties at Shanghai was another weapon Bowring planned to use to facilitate treaty revision. After the collapse of the Chinese customs house in September 1853, the British and American consuls had secured bonds from their merchants in lieu of the duties they should have paid to the Chinese, out of a sense of duty and honesty. When Bowring and McLane arrived at Shanghai, they both tried to make their merchants honour their bonds. Whereas J. K. Fairbank, using the official papers, has shown that the Chinese permitted the establishment of the "foreign inspectorate in exchange for back duties"; Bartle, consulting the Rylands manuscripts as well, has been able to write that Bowring and McLane, "in return for undertaking to make the merchants pay their arrear duties, obtained Keih's promise to convey to Peking the desire of the three powers to secure a revision of their treaty rights". Then he adds that the Governor later "suddenly withdrew his offer to mediate". One wishes that Bartle had gone on to explain this abrupt change of attitude. Otherwise one is left with the impression that Chi-erh-hang-a was untrustworthy or even treacherous. Costin mentioned that "an imperial edict had been issued commanding the two foreigners to go to Canton and settle affairs with Yeh". Here, Costin, in turn, failed to explain the uncompromising attitude adopted by Peking, although he had exonerated the Governor.

1 See Fairbank, pp. 439 ff.
2 Chi-erh-hang-a and I-liang appear in English documents as Keih and I-leung respectively.
3 Fairbank, pp. 453-5. There is a slight inaccuracy in the phrase quoted, because the back duties were not actually given in exchange.
5 Costin, p. 189.
The English sources available do not have much to offer in the way of an answer to this question. The Chinese sources, on the other hand, are illuminating. It seems that Bowring had made some serious mistakes from the beginning. His hasty departure for Shanghai shortly after his arrival at Hong Kong had aroused considerable suspicion in Peking. The fact that he came to Shanghai on board a man-of-war greatly aggravated such suspicion. Then his despatch of Medhurst up the Yangtze River to meet the Taiping leaders proved the last straw. The Emperor asked, "If the British consider themselves our friends, trading with us, why should they go out of their way to ingratiate themselves with our enemies?"

There followed an episode which has been omitted by Costin and those who rely entirely on this pioneer for information. McLane had arrived at Shanghai before Bowring and had been clamouring to see the Governor-General, I-liang, who was stationed at Soochow. Eventually I-liang agreed to see him at K'un-shan, about two-thirds of the way from Shanghai to Soochow. The meeting took place on 21 June 1854. Although Bowring was already in Shanghai by this time, he had come too late to be included in this arrangement. It hardly mattered. Bowring had become such a good friend of the American Commissioner that he thought nothing could be more "accordant and harmonious" than their co-operation. Moreover, McLane had promised Bowring that he "would not take any step without previous consultation" with him. To return to the meeting between McLane and I-liang, the American Commissioner raised the question of treaty revision and the opening of the Yangtze River for foreign trade. When the minutes of the conference reached Peking, the Emperor issued the strictest injunction on 15 July 1854 that on no account should McLane continue to roam about in China, but should immediately proceed to Canton and raise whatever matter he had in mind.

1 CSL HF 133: 8-9, Edict, 7 July 1854. Bowring went to Shanghai on board H.M.S. Winchester (Ryl. Eng. MS. 1228, Bowring-Edgar Bowring, 26 May 1854).
2 Fairbank, pp. 456-7.
with the Imperial Commissioner for Foreign Affairs. If the report on the meeting of 21 June did not reach Peking until about 15 July, it will be safe to assume that the imperial edict of 15 July took an equally long time to reach Shanghai, around 3 August. The last date was of course the time when both McLane and Bowring were told to leave Shanghai for Canton by Chi-erh-hang-a who, in a previous meeting with them on 27 July, had succumbed to Bowring's exploitation of the back duties. As mentioned, Chi-erh-hang-a had agreed to transmit their communications to Peking in return for their undertaking to make the merchants pay their arrear duties.

It should be pointed out that whereas the injunction concerned McLane alone, Chi-erh-hang-a told Bowring to leave as well. He must have taken the initiative to do so, pretending that Bowring was also affected. This is indeed disgraceful, but beside the point. The question is, how does one explain his behaviour, which is crucial to an understanding of the important issue of treaty revision? Here, as elsewhere, a pioneer piece of work by its very nature often leaves something to be desired. Historians who refer to Constin alone generally assume that Chi-erh-hang-a was the Governor when McLane and Bowring arrived at Shanghai. In fact, the Governor at this time was a man called Hsü Nai-ch'ao, and Chi-erh-hang-a was only Provincial Treasurer. The Emperor had shown great dissatisfaction with Hsü's lack of success against the Shanghai rebels. Hsü's conciliatory attitude towards the Plenipotentiaries was the drop that made the cup overflow. He was summarily dismissed on 7 July 1854. Chi-erh-hang-a was appointed as successor. Hsü had agreed to meet Bowring and McLane; and Chi-erh-hang-a honoured this agreement on 27 July, as mentioned. Within a week, however, he received the edict commanding McLane to leave for Canton. In the same edict, Hsü was severely censured for having agreed to see the envoys.

2 As another example, Chi-erh-hang-a's letter of appointment was dated 7 July 1854. His reply accepting the appointment arrived at Peking on 16 August 1854.
3 For example, Bartle, "Treaty", p. 290.
It also enjoined Chi-erh-hang-a and I-liang to annul whatever understanding Hsü might have come to with the foreigners.\(^1\)

Seeing what had happened to his predecessor, it is obvious that Chi-erh-hang-a panicked and washed his hands of the affair.

Bowring was bitterly disappointed. He had previously advocated a joint expedition to the Peiho demanding an audience with the Emperor. This was on 27 July, immediately after their first meeting with Chi-erh-hang-a. He argued that the moment was "singularly favourable" for taking such action due to "the presence of large fleets in the Chinese seas, the good feeling which the settlement of the duty question has produced here, the tottering state of the Empire and the demands made upon us for interference, and the general principle that prompt action is the great element of success, and that delays are always perilous".\(^2\)

Although the Governor had agreed to mediate, and although the envoys had agreed to meet again in forty days at Shanghai to hear the result of the Governor's move,\(^3\) Bowring thought that he might facilitate the proceedings by steaming up to the Peiho. Admiral Stirling and McLane disagreed. Stirling argued that the opening given them by the Governor "ought at all events to be first tried, that a visit to the capital would be premature".\(^4\) Bowring gave in. When the Governor backslid, Bowring again attempted to prevail upon the others in vain. Instead, he was once more urged to begin with Yeh, then to proceed to the Peiho in the Autumn if nothing could be gained at Canton. The noises Bowring made, however, far from helping his cause, bedevilled it further. The Emperor decreed, "I have heard that the American and British representatives have threatened to come to Tientsin. These people are used to employ every excuse to make demands, and what they say is often no more than an empty threat designed to sound out our position".\(^5\)

On the same day, he repeated what he had defined earlier that Commissioner Yeh should do when meeting the Plenipotentiaries, "Stick absolutely to the treaty and on no

\(^1\) Ibid. 15 July 1854.
\(^3\) F.O. 17.215, Bowring-Clarendon, 27 July 1854.
\(^5\) CSL HF 136 : 16-17, Edict, 8 August 1854.
account allow them to make any unreasonable demands under
the guise of treaty revision". This instruction heralded the
third phase of Bowring's diplomatic activities.

While McLane professed that he had no desire whatever to
see Commissioner Yeh, although he was going to Canton
nonetheless, Bowring began to make preparations to approach
Yeh formally for a revision of the treaty. Lord Clarendon had
told him that 29 August 1854 was the date due for revision;
therefore, after he returned to Hong Kong in August, Bowring
despatched his Chinese Secretary, Medhurst, to Canton for
preliminary discussions. His instructions to Medhurst may be
summarized as follows.

1. To request an interview with Yeh within the city walls of
Canton, or in Hong Kong.
2. To find out if the Commissioner had the power to
negotiate a new treaty.
3. To return to Hong Kong immediately if the answer to the
second was negative.

When Yeh heard of the arrival of Medhurst, he despatched two
"respectable and suitable men, both being magistrates of
important districts," to meet him. As soon as he heard of
Bowring's intentions, he realized that he had an unusually
difficult task on his hands. It is interesting to note that Bowring
placed entry into the walled city of Canton at the top of his
priority list. His obsession with this question, and why Yeh
found it impossible to satisfy such an obsession, has been dealt
with in a separate article. As regards the second object of
Medhurst's mission, one can anticipate Yeh's reaction, recalling
the Emperor's instruction. He replied as follows:

I am charged with the Superintendence of trade at the five ports on the express
understanding that I act in accordance with established regulations [treaty

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1 Ibid. See also HF 134: 2, 15 July 1854.
2 F.O. 17.215, Bowring-Clarendon, 3 August 1854.
3 F.O. 17.210, Clarendon-Bowring, 13 February 1854.
4 F.O. 17.215, Desp. 128. Incl. 2, Bowring-Medhurst, 22 August 1854. (See
5 Ibid. Incl. 5, Medhurst-Bowring, 2 September 1854.
6 See my article on the Canton City Question mentioned above.
As a result, Medhurst complied with his third instruction by abruptly terminating his visit to Canton. Meanwhile, the representatives of the three treaty Powers of Britain, France and America were instructed by their respective governments to take concerted action. They conferred in Hong Kong and decided to return to the north. On 30 September 1854, they were all back in Shanghai, ready to perform Act Four of the drama.

Bowring was full of determination to achieve something by this move. He told the Foreign Secretary, “Now at all events I have an end and an object, to open China and if you will support me, and I have such colleagues as the U.S. have now sent, we will open China. Aye! and with the keys of peace”.

One wonders how many “keys of peace” Bowring possessed. We have seen that he had used one, namely, the question of back duties, with some success against Chi-erh-hang-a. Unfortunately, although that key opened the gate of the garden, it did not open the door of the house. This time, he planned to use another key which he hoped might fit both locks. This was the confusion in China. Whereas his immediate predecessor, Sir George Bonham, had been convinced that so long as the Taiping and other rebellions were raging in China, nothing could be done in the way of treaty revision, Bowring had always believed that the confusion “invites us to avail ourselves of the changes which are inevitable.” In other words, he was hoping to exploit the weakened position of the Manchus, to induce them to give more concessions by some kind of promise to side with them. However, he had been cautioned by Clarendon against

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1 F.O. 17.215, Desp. 128. Incl. 6, Yeh-Bowring, 1 September 1854. I have not been able to find the Chinese original of this English version of the document. However, it is obvious from the Chinese sources available that “established regulations” is a translation of the phrase ch’eng-yüeh, and is not entirely accurate because ch’eng-yüeh literally means “established agreements”. Indeed, the phrase is used in Chinese documents to refer to the treaty.

2 Ibid. 5, 11 and 29 September 1854.


4 Ibid. C8 China, Bonham-Clarendon, 5 August 1854.

5 Ibid. Bowring-Clarendon, 23 February 1854.
taking any part in the civil contest" in China. He realized that he could not blatantly disobey orders although he was convinced that somehow he had to do so to some extent if he were to succeed. He decided to act according to his own judgement, but took two precautions to mitigate the consequences should things go seriously wrong. First, he tried to persuade the Foreign Secretary that the step he was about to take was a necessary one. The choice, he argued, was between "anarchy on the one side and feebleness on the other". The success of the rebellion, he asserted, would mean "the establishment of difficulties greater than we had to struggle before the Opium War". To side with the feeble, however, would bring the British position "as near territorial possession as it can well be". He asked Clarendon to "instruct us as to our course". The request was superfluous and deliberate.

Secondly, he let McLane do the crucial talking. The American envoy told the Chinese that if the Emperor agreed to send an Imperial Commissioner specially to negotiate a new treaty, his country would be willing to co-operate with them to clear Shanghai and the whole of the Yangtze River area of rebels, and to order the merchants to pay all the back duties so as to help Chinese military finance. Since the Taipings were active mainly in the Yangtze River area, this is tantamount to saying that the Manchus would be assisted in stamping out the Taipings. It is impossible to imagine Bowring making a statement of this kind. But since the three envoys were jointly approaching the Chinese, the offer of one was as good as that of another. With good reason, Bowring made this remark privately to his son, "What I could have done without the assistance of the United States Commissioner I know not." For his part, Bowring offered to "co-operate with the Chinese government to clear the coast of thieves". This is far less specific than the offer of McLane. But, although the English version referred to the

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1 P.O. 17.210, Clarendon-Bowring, 13 February 1854.
3 Ch'ou-pan i-wu shih-mo 8:32-35 and 9:3, Memos to Emperor, 30 August and 15 October 1854.
5 See the preceding footnote but one.
pirates on the Chinese coast, the Chinese version hai-pin tao-fei (coastal thieves) could be taken to mean the Taiping and other rebels in the maritime provinces.

Chi-erh-hang-a was greatly impressed. He had had little success fighting the Shanghai rebels since he became Governor, and he was afraid that he might suffer the fate of his predecessor. Naturally, the offers of the envoys were sweet music to him. He dared not suggest to the Emperor that he should seek foreign assistance; but if only he could persuade him to send an Imperial Commissioner to negotiate a new treaty, this assistance, he thought, would be forthcoming. Boldly, he told His Majesty that it would be useless to resist the demands of the foreign envoys, just as it had been futile to resist the British demands prior to the Opium War. Rather than watch helplessly the foreigners taking unilateral action, forcing their way up the Yangtze River, it would be better to come to an understanding with them first. Furthermore, should the foreigners decide not to pay any customs duties, there would be no money to fight not only the Shanghai rebels but the Taiping rebels as well. He concluded by repeating the threats he had received, namely, that the envoys would recommend a military solution to their kings if their demands were not met, in which case war would come within six months. With great resentment the Emperor reprimanded the Governor for having believed everything he was told.

At the same time that the Emperor was giving the Governor a piece of his mind, the envoys arrived at the Peiho, having decided not to stay in Shanghai any longer than was necessary. The expedition was not as grand as Bowring had hoped. Admiral Stirling gave him only one ship, H.M.S. Rattler, declaring that he needed the rest to watch the Russians. The French Minister declined to participate on the ground that he had no man-of-war at his disposal. He was represented by his attaché. Only McLane could provide an adequate force to make the expedition

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1 Ibid. See also CSL HF 134: 9-11, Edict, 15 October 1854.
2 Ibid.
3 It turned out months later that Stirling had taken the fleet to Japan in the fashion of Commodore Perry, much to Bowring’s disgust. See Bartle, “Treaty”, pp. 295-6.
look respectable. Despite these setbacks, Bowring was optimistic. Possibly, his morale had been greatly boosted by the repeated success of his diplomacy on Chi-erh-hang-a. "I am not without hopes that you will hear from me under the date of Peking", he wrote to his son Edgar, "this is quite upon the cards and if we get there, be assured we shall do something". Unfortunately, he never got there. The envoys were met by a high-ranking Chinese official near Tientsin. Bowring presented eighteen points for a new treaty, which were all politely but firmly turned down however much he waved his "keys of peace". It is interesting to read the Imperial edict which dictated such a firm line. The Emperor pointed out that it was too early for the Americans and the French even to think of treaty revision. As for the English, their treaty made no provision for revision. "What do you mean by a treaty," he asked, "if you do not intend to keep it? Even if we work on a most-favoured-nation principle, what are the English asking for? For something which neither the Americans nor the French have received?" One is bound to observe that his argument, despite its unminced words, comes close to the advice Clarendon eventually received from his law officers.

Bowring's mission had failed. His conclusion provides some food for thought. He said, "At all events I have cleared much rubbish away, and have enabled 'my masters' to see pretty clearly the state of things." Persuasion, legal excuses, inducements, threats, all had proved useless. What would a Power resort to if she were determined to have her way? This is the crucial question in international relations; and before the age of cold war and clandestine subversions, the answer was inevitably "might is right". When the Crimean War was over in 1856, British troops were shipped to the Far East.

Unfortunately, historians are frequently misled and in turn misleading. For example, they have often attributed Bowring's

1 Ryl. Eng. MS. 1228, Bowring-Edgar Bowring, 7 October 1854.
SIR JOHN BOWRING

failure to the "obstructive and evasive mandarins". This is not surprising. Bowring did so himself, and historians seem to have a tendency to be influenced by the manuscripts they read. After he had written his first letter to Yeh in April 1854, Bowring said that he expected only "an evasive answer on the subject of the Treaty with China". Having corresponded with Yeh for about a month, Bowring complained that it was difficult "to get on with these stubborn mandarins". Then he told Clarendon not to expect much from him, because "moving mandarins is like forcing water from stones". When Chi-erh-hang-a swallowed his own words, Bowring declared that he was not at all surprised, as he had never accommodated his policy to "a confidence in the value of any promises made by any mandarins in the Chinese Empire". While back in Shanghai in October 1854 holding another series of conferences with Chi-erh-hang-a, he proclaimed that his actions in China were guided by his conviction that the "purposes of the Chinese officials are distinctly and decidedly opposed to our own; so that distrust and not confidence is the only safe ground to occupy in relations with them".

Bowring was perhaps unfair in his denunciation of the Chinese officials. Chi-erh-hang-a, for example, was probably inexperienced but not mischievous. He became Governor after he had been Provincial Treasurer for less than a year, whereas under normal circumstances he would have been in that position for at least three years. Even the Emperor took a charitable view and wrote to him, encouraging him to work hard and learn fast, because he had not served for long in the maritime provinces. It was rash of him to commit himself to mediation as soon as Bowring said he would make the merchants pay their

4 F.O. 17.215, Bowring-Clarendon, 3 August 1854.
5 F.O. 17.216, Bowring-Clarendon, 4 October 1854.
6 CSL HF 133 : 7, Edict, 7 July 1854.
7 A Chinese official was customarily promoted or transferred every three years. The rebellions had probably caused some exceptions to this rule.
8 CSL HF 137 : 20, Edict, 16 August 1854.
back duties; cowardly of him to retract; and foolish to play into Bowring's hands again over the question of foreign military aid. It is obvious that he was not responsible for Bowring's failure, nor, indeed, was any of the mandarins. Peking made the decisions, and her functionaries merely carried them out. Bowring's accusations are therefore misplaced, and historians who echo him are responsible for obscuring the main issue. The point is, Britain wanted China to make some important concessions; China refused, because she had no reason to oblige. No man in his senses would make concessions detrimental to himself. He would do so only under duress.

China had persistently refused to give up the century-old practice of restricting westerners to Canton, despite the efforts of their Lordships Macartney, Amherst, and Napier to negotiate, until she was defeated in the Opium War, 1839-42. She persistently resisted the demands to negotiate a new treaty involving further and greater concessions, despite the battles by their Excellencies Bowring and McLane for revision, until she was defeated in the Arrow War, 1856-60.

China had restricted all international trade to Canton in 1757 and set up the irksome Canton system to control westerners only after she had suffered more than two centuries at the hands of the plundering Portuguese, the ravaging Dutch, and the British and French, who constantly brought their European disputes to the Far East. When the first Portuguese came to China at the beginning of the sixteenth century, they found all the ports in China open to trade. Through bitter experience, China slowly evolved the Canton system in the hope of exercising some control over the rowdy foreigners. Advocates of the theory of tributary system, who use the Canton restrictions to prove the superiority complex of the Chinese, are as much at fault as those who use Bowring's frustrations to illustrate the deviousness of the Chinese. There had been times when China had to pay annual tributes to a foreign power, and to address its monarch as uncle or even father. That was in the Sung period (960-1278), when China lived under constant fear of invasion and even annihilation.

1 See H. Franke, "Treaties between Sung and Chin", Études Song, 1 (1970), 55-84.
Attempting to use the so-called Chinese superiority complex to explain the difficulties in Anglo-Chinese relations prior to the Opium War, and the alleged Chinese deviousness to explain those before the Arrow War, is to focus attention on the Chinese, obscuring the fact that there is a chapter in the history of mankind called European Expansion, and denying that there is such a thing as power politics in the international relations of the nineteenth century.

When studying Sir John Bowring and, indeed, any historical topic, it is important not only to know the relevant details and analyse their significance, but also to put them in a wider perspective. Sir John is the last of a series of names, beginning with Macartney, who continued to knock on the doors of China until troops were eventually summoned to force them open. Furthermore, Bowring himself played no small part in summoning these troops. Despite his connection with the Peace Society, he constantly advocated "gunboat diplomacy" to accompany his "instruments of peace". At first he did so privately, and later, officially, to the Foreign Secretary. By 27 September 1856, he was firmly convinced that coercion was indispensable.

I see nothing to alter, and very much to confirm the opinion that negotiation unsupported by a considerable fleet will terminate in disappointment and discomfiture.

Within two weeks, he threw away all scruples and used the so-called Arrow incident to shell the city of Canton, hoping to force Commissioner Yeh to come to terms with him. That was how the Arrow War began.

As a result of this war, Britain finally obtained more or less all she had desired, and one no longer finds another Bowring steaming up and down the coast of China.

2 MSS. Clar. Dep. passim; F.O. 17, Bowring's official despatches, passim.
3 F.O. 17.250, Bowring-Clarendon, 27 September 1856.
NOTES AND NEWS

The Library has on display from January to April in the Deansgate building an exhibition "Art and Artistry in Medieval Manuscripts" which consists of a selection of some of its more notable examples of medieval calligraphy and illumination, ranging in date from the ninth century to the fifteenth.

Among the earlier items are several of German provenance. These include the oldest surviving Gospel Book of Bremen Cathedral (c. A.D. 1000), a volume which escaped both their great fire of 1041 and Henry the Lion's plundering of the Cathedral Library in 1155, and two illuminated codices which stylistically seem to be unique. One, a Lectionary from the Benedictine Abbey of Prüm, was written between 1026 and 1068, the other, dating from the 1170s or 1180s, appears to be the only Essen manuscript outside Germany; Svanhild, Abbess of Essen, is depicted in its opening miniature. Also from Germany, and both dating from the ninth/tenth century, are a Psalter from the famous Abbey of St. Maximin at Trier, well-known to scholars for its annotated Calendar and its Continental-Celtic style of decoration, and a text of Abbot Jonas's "Life of St. Columbanus". Another Psalter, later in date (eleventh/twelfth century), was formerly owned by the Duke of Sussex, son of George III. Of importance palaeographically is a ninth-century codex from Spain. This, Smaragdus's "Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict", is in a pre-Carolingian hand of the Visigothic
type. Visigothic manuscripts are not common and the Library is fortunate to possess three. Also from Spain is a "Commentary on the Apocalypse" by Beatus, Abbot of Valcavado; dating from the twelfth century, it is adorned with over 100 miniatures and also includes a world map. Another illuminated text of the twelfth century, executed in Italy, contains the Canons of Burchardus, Bishop of Worms (d. 1025).

Equally notable examples occur from later centuries. The mid-thirteenth century "Henry of Chichester" Missal is of importance both liturgically and for the student of English illumination. It has a splendid series of full-page miniatures before the Canon of the Mass depicting scenes from the Annunciation to the Resurrection as well as historiated initials; it also has its original binding. From the same century are a "Psalterium et Horae", remarkable for its wealth of decoration, and a folio Bible, containing historiated initials and miniatures of first-class quality. The former was executed in France, the latter probably in French Flanders. Another manuscript from French Flanders, assigned to the third quarter of the fourteenth century, is illustrated by a series of 96 miniatures of scenes from the Apocalypse, two occupying each page. Dating from nearer the beginning of that century (c. 1300) is an illuminated Arthurian manuscript containing the second part of the "Lancelot", the "Quest of the Holy Grail", and the "Death of King Arthur".

The fifteenth century is represented by manuscripts from Italy, Flanders, France, Germany and England. From Italy are shown an illuminated Carmelite Missal (perhaps executed in Padua); the "Astrologia" of Christianus Prolianus in a text of c. 1470/80, with the white branch-work borders typical of the time; and the second of our three-volume "Postilla" of Nicholas de Lyra. The last, profusely illustrated and noteworthy for its studies of animals and birds, was commissioned by Pandolfo di Malatesta and completed in April 1402. From the Library's Books of Hours has been selected one executed in Flanders containing 12 large and 18 smaller miniatures of superior workmanship, some with unusual architectural backgrounds. A plainer text is a "Régime de Santé", a translation
of a treatise on health compiled by Aldobrandinus of Siena and based on Arabic sources. The "Speculum Humanae Salvationis" was well known in the fifteenth century. It tells pictorially the Bible story from the Fall to the Redemption, showing how the Incarnation and Passion had been prefigured, especially in the History of Israel. The example shown was written and illustrated in Germany in the early years of that century. Two fifteenth-century English manuscripts are included. One, containing Lydgate's "Siege of Troy", dates from c. 1475 and contains 69 unusual miniatures, of which the first, portraying the author offering his work to Henry V, was clearly modelled on that in the presentation copy itself. The Library has two manuscripts of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales", one complete but unadorned and the other illustrated but comprising only two folios. The latter is exhibited. It contains part of the Prologue of the Miller's Tale and part of the Tale itself, preceded by a tinted drawing of the Miller.

In connection with the World of Islam Festival the Library is also arranging in the Deansgate Building a special exhibition of its Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts. These were mostly acquired in 1901 when Mrs. Rylands purchased the manuscript section, Eastern and Western, of the Bibliotheca Lindesiana of the Earls of Crawford. The Bibliotheca Lindesiana itself incorporated a number of important Oriental collections, for Lord Lindsay (later 25th Earl), who was primarily concerned, was a collector of discrimination. Mainly as a result of his efforts we have a collection of Arabic codices which spans roughly one thousand years, a Persian collection ranging from the thirteenth century to the nineteenth, and a Turkish collection which runs from the late fifteenth century to the nineteenth. The subject range is equally wide. Theology, history, literature, jurisprudence, science, philosophy, medicine, all are represented, and several unique and rare texts occur as well as codices outstanding for their calligraphy, decoration and, amongst the Persian and Turkish manuscripts, miniature painting.
The Arabic collection includes some 50 Qur’âns, from early vellum texts in Kufic to exquisite examples dating from later centuries. Four of these are being exhibited, two (twelfth and fourteenth centuries) written in gold, one (sixteenth century) decorated throughout in blue and gold with floral ornamentation, and one (fifteenth century), from Mamluk Egypt, which is trilingual (Arabic, Persian and Turki); the last originally filled 30 volumes, but only 14 have survived, all in the Library. Two others of our Qur’âns have been loaned to the British Library, to form part of their special exhibition on “The Qur’ân”, which is to comprise select manuscripts from this country and from Islamic countries. In addition to the sacred book of Islam, the Deansgate exhibition will also include rare and unique texts from our collections. Among these are an early twelfth century manuscript of “The Book of Declaration” by 'Ubayd Allâh b. Muḥammad, an eleventh-century work dealing with the reigns of the first four Caliphs, and an early thirteenth-century text of “The Book of Religion and Empire” of 'Alî b. Rabbân al-Ṭabarî, written at the court of the Caliph Mutawakkil and containing a semi-official defence and exposition of Islam. One of the finest items calligraphically is a thirteenth-century vellum codex of Muslim’s “Ṣâḥīḥ”; in a beautiful Maghribî hand, it has some 1500 sectional headings in gold and head-ornamentations in gold and colours. A history of the Yemen from the time of the Prophet to A.D. 1399 is also of note, having been written by the seventh Sultan of the Rasûlî dynasty. Of importance to the student of Moroccan history is a collection of correspondence of Moorish officials and others chiefly with Franz von Dombay and mainly covering the years 1780 to 1787. Dombay served as Hapsburg consul in Tangier from 1783 to 1787, was afterwards appointed to the Austrian embassy in Madrid, and from 1792 served in the Imperial Chancellery in Vienna. An eighteenth-century Arabic-Italian dictionary and classified vocabulary is not only important lexicographically but also interesting as having belonged to Dr. Meryon, personal physician to and biographer of Lady Hester Stanhope; bound inside is correspondence of Meryon and the Swiss orientalist and explorer Burckhardt.
The Persian exhibits also include items important for their texts and illumination. We have eleven manuscripts of Firdawsi’s “Shāh-nāma” and from these has been selected one illuminated in Shīrāz which was formerly in the library of the King of Oudh. Nizāmī is also well represented in our collections, for we have 15 manuscripts of his works. Two of these are being displayed, a “Khamṣa”, containing miniatures stylistically associated with Shīrāz and the court painters of its Timurid governor Ibrāhīm Sultan b. Shāh Rukh, and a “Khusrau o Shīrīn”, written by a royal scribe and with miniatures in the court style of Shāh Tāhmasp; the latter formerly belonged to the Oriental scholar Sir Gore Ouseley. A copy of the “Bustān” of Sa’dī is of interest as having been written by Muḥammad Ḥusayn, of Kashmir, a noted penman at the court of Akbar. Jāmī is represented by a text of his “Yūsuf o Zulaykhā”, the romance of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife; our manuscript was written within 30 years of Jāmī’s death. A splendid copy, executed in A.D. 1629, of the poetical works of ’Urﬁ contains not merely richly ornamented pages and fine miniatures but also has a contemporary binding, decorated in gold with birds and beasts and stamped with couplets from the poet’s verses. Also included in the exhibition is a Persian version of the fables of Bidpai written at the beginning of the thirteenth century and notable for its early date.

Although less wide in range and number than the two preceding collections, there are also several items of considerable note amongst the Turkish manuscripts. These include the third section of the famous Ouseley manuscript of Nevā’ī’s “Khamṣa” (the others are in the Bodleian); a fifteenth-century dīvān of Aḥmedī, a very early copy of this rare work; the “Ḥāṣimnāme” of Ḥajjī Mehmed Tokatī, apparently unique; and an interesting mid-eighteenth-century processional roll, nearly 26 feet long, comprising a series of paintings of over 80 Turkish officials, all with their ranks and offices described.

The exhibition will remain on display from April until September.
The ephemeral nature of newspapers, in their own context, and their prosaic usefulness in everyday life, militate against their survival. They are not obviously precious and they are difficult to preserve and to store. They are, however, priceless material for the social historian, and it is salutary for a library rich in acknowledged treasures to give due prominence to collections of newspapers dating from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.

In the present exhibition in the Deansgate building, one of the immediate predecessors of the English newsbook is *Newes out of Holland*, 1619, containing foreign news translated or adapted from Dutch models. The earliest home-produced newspapers and newsbooks issued by Butter and Bourne in the 1620s and 1630s consisted of dull, factual accounts of events abroad: *The Continuation of our Weekley Newes*, 1631, shown in the exhibition, lacks both fire and immediacy. These essential journalistic qualities were supplied by the circumstances of the Civil War; and the liveliest of the seventeenth-century newsbooks, also displayed, illustrate the impetus given to journalism by the activities of Royalists and Roundheads and by the greater freedom accorded to newswriters through the abolition of the Star Chamber in 1641. In the exhibition there are examples of the earliest newspapers to incorporate illustration (*A Perfect Diurnall*, 1642), to present propaganda (*Special Passages*, 1642), to summarize the contents on the front or back page by the use of headlines (*Mercurius Civicus*, 1644), and to devote pages to advertisements (*The Newes*, 1663). In *A Perfect Diurnall* for 30 January 1649, there is a poignant, understated account of the execution of King Charles I. Newsbooks of the late 1640s and the 1650s were no longer exclusively concerned with political and military activities: domestic crimes and misadventures were reported (*Several Proceedings*, 1655), references made to current fashions in the attire of women (*Mercurius Politicus*, 1655), and statistics given concerning victims of the plague (*The Newes*, 1655). Many of the seventeenth-century newsbooks shown form part of the comprehensive collection deposited in the Library by the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres.
The Library also possesses a substantial run from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century of the first "official" English newspaper, the *Oxford Gazette*, later the *London Gazette*, distinguished by the significant words "published by authority". In format, the *Gazette* appeared as a proper newspaper, not as a pamphlet newsbook, and it was first issued from Oxford in 1665 when the Great Plague had forced the Court to seek refuge in that city. It was soon transferred to London and the 85th issue, which is shown, records the Great Fire of London.

In the eighteenth-century examples displayed, emphasis is placed on the proliferation of provincial newspapers in the course of the century, on the reflection of English attitudes to French affairs in the revolutionary period and of Irish opinions of the English in the crucial years before the Act of Union. The *Nottingham Journal* for 30 March 1799 contains much news from the metropolis, interspersed with local advertisements, gossip, and the racing results presented under the grandiose headline: "Sporting Intelligence". The *York Herald* for 2 March 1793, issued just after the outbreak of war with France, records the dramatic effects on Northern industrial prosperity: "The price paid to weavers in Manchester is dropt within a few days, four shillings in fourteen, and the demand for cotton twist diminishes so rapidly that scarcely any reduction of price will prevent its accumulating upon the hands of the manufacturers." The *English Chronicle* for 22 January 1793, is as much concerned with the dealings of the National Convention in France as it is with the proceedings of our own Parliament, and it contains on the back page the announcement of the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January.

In the Irish newspapers of the late eighteenth century, anti-English feeling is apparent, either blatantly expressed or discreetly conveyed. *The Public Register*, the official newspaper of the national party of Ireland, in the issue for 3 October 1772 shown in the exhibition, finds nothing praiseworthy in the lazy habits of some Londoners who sleep themselves to death; but the *Dublin Morning Chronicle* for 22 April 1796 is more circumspect if no less sincere in its guarded criticism of the appointment
of the unpopular Marquis of Camden as lord-lieutenant, in place of Earl Fitzwilliam, who had proved a champion of Irish rights.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the emergence of the specialist newspapers, some sectarian, some propagandist, all dedicated to a cause. There is shown the cyclostyled pages of the *Irish Bulletin*, 1920–1, the official organ of the Sinn Fein party in Ireland, listing the casualties, arrests and trials of its members. *The Common Cause*, published between 1909 and 1917, is devoted to the suffragette movement and is open at a page indicating Winston Churchill's support of the aims, if not of the methods, of these militant women in search of the vote. The first issue of *Birth Control News*, May 1922, commemorates the heroic efforts of Marie Stopes and her friends to encourage "planned parenthood" as a means of improving human conditions. *The Blackshirt*, on display at the issue for October 1938, is a reminder that the Fascist movement gained support in the 1930s because it drew attention to the social problems arising from the economic crisis. The stark newspapers of the General Strike of 1926 recall a national emergency which reduced all services to a minimum but which did not destroy interest in the cricket scores.

Finally, the exhibition is concerned with the complete sets of modern daily newspapers which have been transferred to the Library as donation or deposit. *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* are the most notable of these. The rare first issue of the *Manchester Guardian* for 5 May 1821, is displayed, with its prominent declaration of Guardian "liberalism": "though we will not compromise the right of making pointed animadversions on public questions, we hope so to deliver them, as that even our political opponents, shall admit the propriety of the spirit in which they are written, however fundamentally they may differ from their own principles and views." The first issue of the *Daily Mail* for 4 May 1896, is also shown, advertising itself as "the busy man's daily journal". Modern journalism, with its compelling use of headline and photograph is illustrated in more recent issues of the *Mail*, recording the second great fire of London in December 1940 and the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963.
Such is the substance of history, preserved in its own frame, in the form of the newspaper.

In the Bulletin for Autumn 1974 we recorded the acquisition of a group of letters written to John Fielden of Todmorden, M.P. for Oldham, 1832–47. The Library has recently purchased a further extensive collection of correspondence, papers and accounts relating to him and to the family cotton-manufacturing firm of Fielden Brothers, Waterside Mills, Todmorden, which was one of the most famous of nineteenth-century textile concerns.

The collection provides information both for historians of the cotton industry and for students of social development in the nineteenth century. Much of the correspondence dates from between 1811 and the late 1840s. It includes a series of 82 letters written from Liverpool in 1814, which give details of the state of the market during the war with America, the trade embargoes being enforced, and the resulting shortages of cotton. Another group of 80 letters, written by William Clegg of Manchester, between 1836 and 1841, contains accounts of political events in the North West and the agitation for social reform, as well as dealing with the cotton trade. Other correspondence, exchanged between the four Fielden brothers, who continued the concern founded by their father Joshua, provides an essential source both for the history of the family and for its place in the industrial development of the first half of the nineteenth century. Amongst numerous financial accounts are details of the wages paid to cotton operatives, including those received by women in the Manchester mills, and comparisons between the wages of Fielden Brothers' employees and those of other companies.

That part of the collection which relates directly to John Fielden contains items dealing with many aspects of his political career, and reflects his importance as a Radical Member of Parliament and a champion of factory reform, most particularly in respect of his support of legislation to limit hours of work. It comprises drafts of his letters, notes for speeches, and letters
addressed to him on various political subjects. With these should be mentioned a series of financial accounts (1836–40) relating to the radical paper *The Champion and Weekly Herald*, founded by Cobbett’s sons and largely financed by Fielden himself.

The following is a list of recent Library publications, consisting, with the exception of the last item, of reprints of articles which appeared in the latest *Bulletin Library Publications* (Autumn 1975):

"Jewish Apocalyptic in Recent Scholarly Study." By James Barr, M.A., B.D., F.B.A., Professor of Semitic Languages and Literatures in the University of Manchester. 8vo, pp. 27. Price 70p.


"Ruth : Mrs. Gaskell’s Neglected Novel." By A. J. Shelton, M.A., Senior Lecturer in English Literature in the University of Manchester. 8vo, pp. 20. Price 55p.

"The American Writer and the Victorian North West." By Dennis Welland, M.A., Ph.D., Professor of American Literature in the University of Manchester. 8vo, pp. 23. Price 60p.


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